CRITICAL DISAGREEMENTS: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE AVANT-GARDE IN THE ARGENTINE NOVEL

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Critical Disagreements contributes to the re-thinking of aesthetic modernity in Latin America by studying the literary projects of three foundational Argentine novelists: Macedonio Fernández, Roberto Arlt, and Ricardo Piglia. It works from an initial opposition between two prominent narratives used in the historiography of modernism in the arts: a narrative of autonomization of art *from* life, in which modernism is driven by the impulse of purifying itself of external influence, and a narrative of reintegration of art *with* life, in which the principal objective of modernism is to lay bare, overcome, or erase the gap separating art from everyday social intercourse. While studies of modernism often begin by proposing that either one or the other of these narratives constitutes the primary impulse guiding the historical process of artistic modernism, my dissertation maintains them in a relation of constitutive tension. It proposes that modernism is guided by a double imperative that takes the form of a paradox: art must become autonomous; art must become one with life. Working from this basic thesis, my dissertation re-reads the works of the two most significant Argentine novelists of the early 20th century (Macedonio and Arlt), as well as the reception of their works by writers of later generations, showing how their works navigate this paradox and resist reducing the relationship between art and life to an either/or question of autonomization *or* reintegration.

In recent scholarship in Latin American literary studies, increasingly strident assertions of art's essentially non-autonomous relation to contemporary life have repeatedly been challenged by critical perspectives that continue to insist that, in the words of German philosopher Theodor Adorno, "art's autonomy is irrevocable" (1). *Critical Disagreements* traces a genealogy of these

divergent understandings, using a revision of the literary history of Argentina to show how the relationship between autonomy and integration has been constitutive of the historical movement of modernism itself.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Critical Disagreements

For decades, the historiography of modernism in the arts was dominated by a narrative of autonomization: in modernism, each art, it was thought, progressively dedicates itself to pursuing the intrinsic qualities of its medium, autonomizing itself from the other arts and from the prosaic content of everyday life. Painting pursues the essence of painting, poetry the essence of poetry, and so on. The pursuit of abstraction in abstract expressionist painting and Arthur Schoenberg's invention of the twelve-tone technique of musical composition can be understood as landmarks in this process, as can Vicente Huidobro's poetic works, which in the words of Jorge Schwartz carry out a journey from the referent to the sign, "[negando] la poesía imitativa y de cuño referencial … para incorporar el referente dentro de un sistema poético autónomo" (33). Perhaps the best-known formulation of this narrative is voiced in art critic Clement Greenberg's 1961 essay "Modernist Painting." For Greenberg, the modernist pursuit of autonomy is set in motion by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant employs logic, which Greenberg considers to be the characteristic method of the discipline of philosophy, in order to criticize the discipline itself, purifying it of nonessential elements and establishing the limits of its competence. In doing so, he inaugurates modernism: "[b]ecause he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist" (5). Over the following century and a half, artists working in each artistic medium repeat Kant's critical procedure, making modernism decipherable as a process of self-criticism dedicated to "eliminat[ing] from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art.

Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence" (6).[1]

Until the 1960s and 70s, critical reflection on the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century tended to assimilate avant-garde activity to this narrative of autonomization, viewing the avant-garde as the acceleration and culmination of tendencies already set in motion by the major movements of the previous century, such as romanticism, symbolism, and Spanish-American *modernismo*.[2] A very different understanding of the avant-gardes' relation to modernism, however, emerges during the protest movements and general social unrest of the 1960s and 70s. In those years, artists, protesters, and critical theorists around the world revisited the legacy of the avant-garde, re-narrating the history of movements such as Dada and surrealism

[1] While the prominence of Greenberg in mid-century art criticism granted this narrative a particularly strong place in the visual arts, a similar narrative comes to dominate literary historiography over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. This narrative is often grounded in changing perspectives on beauty in 18th-century aesthetics, in which beauty in art ceases to be tied to the imitation of nature and comes to be linked with the non-utilitarian and intransitive qualities of the work. This sets in motion the pursuit of a purely non-instrumental language freed of reference to the outside reality that previously guaranteed its quality as a beautiful imitation, an aspiration which can be made to unite all major movements in literature, from Romanticism and Symbolism to 20th-century formalist and New Critical approaches to literary criticism. Tzvetan Todorov, writing in 1973, describes this shift as follows:

> "Near the end of the eighteenth century, the definition of beauty will center around the belief in the intransitive (as opposed to instrumental) nature of a work of art … 'True beauty requires that a thing signify nothing but itself, that it be a unity complete in itself,' writes Moritz. And art is defined in terms of beauty: 'If a work of art existed only to point to something other than itself, it would become nothing more than an accessory; whereas in the case of beauty, it alone must always be the principal thing.' Painting is images perceived for themselves and not meant to serve any outside purpose, music is sounds appreciated for themselves. Literature is a noninstrumental language whose value resides in itself alone, or as Novalis has said, 'an expression for the sake of expression" (5). Todorov goes on to explain that this notion of literature, "[e]laborated upon by the German Romanticists … was to dominate all the Symbolist and post-Symbolist movements in Europe. What is more, it was to become the basis for the first modern attempts to create a science of literature. Be it Russian Formalism or American New Criticism, the point of departure is always the same. The function of poetry is essentially to emphasize the 'message' itself. Even today this is the dominant definition, although its formulation may vary somewhat" (5).

As the following pages will show, the forty-five years that have passed since the publication of Todorov's essay have seen the progressive weakening of the dominance enjoyed by this notion of literature.

[2] The opening line of a recent survey of Hispanic-American avant-garde movements neatly condenses this understanding of the avant-garde's relation to literary modernity by conceiving their emergence in terms of an overarching continuity with previous *modernista* tendencies in Latin American literature: "[e]l modernismo, el gran salto a la modernidad que representó su revolución, contenía en su seno, ya en los años finales de su recorrido, los ingredientes necesarios para dar el testigo a la vanguardia" (Barrera 9).

in terms of a generalized, self-critical attack carried out by the historical avant-gardes *against modernism itself*. This narrative receives its canonical formulation in Peter Bürger's 1974 monograph *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, written in the wake of the general strike in Paris in May 1968 and partly inspired by the author's own participation in student protest movements in West Germany.[3] Bürger highlights the way that, as one of the consequences of the historical ascent of the bourgeoisie, the institution of art (that is, the array of formal and informal structures, mechanisms, behaviors, and customs that define how works of art are produced, distributed, and understood by society) progressively comes to be defined by the principle of autonomy. The emergence of aestheticist or "art-for-art's-sake" movements in Europe, which convert autonomy into the primary thematic content of works that are set in verdant gardens, secluded palaces, and ivory towers, far from the hustle and bustle of modern life, elevates the question of autonomy to the center of artistic consciousness. In the wake of aestheticism, autonomy becomes a problem to overcome, rather than a goal to achieve. This transition, in turn, lays the groundwork for the avant-gardes' critique of modernism:

> The avant-garde turns against … the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy. Only after art, in nineteenth-century Aestheticism, has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life can the aesthetic develop "purely." But the other side of autonomy, art's lack of social impact, also becomes recognizable. The avant-garde protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences. (23)

[3] See Bürger's 2010 article "Avant Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*" for a consideration of the historical context in which his book was written and published.

Bürger's words can be read as a dialectical correction to Greenberg's thesis on modernism. Similar to how Greenberg understands modernism, Bürger stresses that the avant-garde is definable as a "stage of self-criticism" (23), but he clarifies that the target of this critique is modernism itself. Unlike Greenberg, whose history of modernist painting through the first half of the 20th century (up to and including abstract expressionism) remains singularly focused on each art's pursuit of medium-specific purity, Bürger insists that this narrative had run its course by around 1900. In an important way, it had succeeded: with aestheticism art *had* radically detached itself from life and declared its independence from a fallen, prosaic social reality. This detachment created the preconditions for the emergence of autonomy-based narratives such as that of Greenberg. When this occurred, however, the pursuit of purity in art, which for Greenberg guarantees its quality and independence, was revealed to have also deadened its social impact. Avant-garde movements such as Dada and surrealism, in short, comprehend the cost at which purity has been bought: social inefficacy, due to the increasingly complete isolation of art from the concerns of everyday life. These movements turn the characteristic method of modernism—autonomization, or the progressive purification of each artistic medium to its innermost qualities—against autonomous art. For Bürger, the avant-gardes, rather than marking the culmination of the modernist drive to autonomy, unanimously seek to annihilate the boundaries that modernism erected between the different arts, and between art and everyday life, in a revolutionary project of reconnecting art with modern social existence. They aspire to nothing less than the dialectical sublation of art into everyday life: autonomous art, for Dada and for the surrealists, "was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form" (49).

It is possible to divide the past hundred years of reflection on modernist and avant-garde art and literature into two periods, based on which one of these two paradigms occupies a dominant position in the critical literature. For much of the twentieth century, the autonomization-based narrative of the history of modernism proposed by Greenberg and others held sway. The past fifty years, in turn, have seen the story of the avant-garde's attempt to sublate art into everyday life gain the upper hand, such that different versions of Bürger's narrative have progressively become, in the words of art historian John Roberts, "the cultural dominant of our age" ("On Autonomy" 25). They have come to form the basis for most contemporary theories of the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century in a process that, in the Latin American context (which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapters), takes place over the course of the final decades of the past century in important works of regional scholarship such as Vicky Unruh's *Latin American Vanguards* (1994). Unruh contrasts the emphasis placed on the progressive distancing of art from life in José Ortega y Gasset's well-known essay *La deshumanización del arte* (1925) to Bürger's discussion of the avant-garde dream of overcoming the gulf separating art from life. She proposes that a common ground for the Latin American avant-gardes can be encountered by subsuming regional attempts to distance art from life to an overarching narrative of reconnection: by "filter[ing] Ortega's metaphor through Bürger's view" (22), we can see that "the very distancing quality in modern art that Ortega called dehumanization turns the public toward, not away from, lived experience" (22).[4] In

[4] See also George Yúdice, "Rethinking the Avant-Garde from the Periphery" (1999). While Yúdice rejects the dialectical framework of Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, insisting that the avant-garde should be understood "not as the moment of sublation of bourgeois art, but rather as a diversity of particular symbolic responses to an historical conjuncture of social, political, economic, and cultural circunstances" (63), he highlights processes similar to those studied by Bürger, in which regional artists such as Mário de Andrade and José Coronel Urtrecho incorporate fragments of the Latin American reality into "avant-gardist 'collage[s]'" (68). Yúdice ultimately grounds the distinctiveness of the Latin American avant-gardes in this "carnivalizing perspective" (70) through which the region's artists and writers construct avant-garde collage-allegories of their nations' peripheral place in the imperialist world-system of the early 20th century. His work is paradigmatic of a broader tendency in Latin

a broader sense, versions of Bürger's narrative of art reconnecting with life have been extended to considerations of aesthetic modernity in its totality, which is increasingly identified with the history of attempts, dating back to German Romanticism and beyond, to reunite the world of art with a modern life that seems increasingly distant from that world.[5]

Rather than privileging one or the other of these narratives, this dissertation situates the Argentine novel of the past hundred years in a state of tension *between* the two. In the chapters that follow, I investigate the ways in which each manner of understanding the history of modernism, and the place of the avant-gardes within that history, obscures significant portions of what is at work in art and literature over the past century. I propose that, in a series of the most influential and far-reaching literary projects of the past hundred years, a typically "avant-garde" tendency of breaking down the institutional barriers separating autonomous art from life has been accompanied by, and is indeed inseparable from, novelists' repeated marking of a "modernist" distinction between art and life in an attempt to preserve, in the last instance, the specificity of a literary or, more broadly speaking, aesthetic difference. This dissertation thus proposes that, instead of concluding that one or the other narratives better grasps the overarching dynamics of modern art, they can be better understood to coexist as dynamically opposed forces in perpetual, irresolvable conflict. Aesthetic modernity can thus be understood to be guided by a double imperative that takes the form of a paradox: art must become autonomous; art must

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American literary studies to spatially organize the two narratives sketched above, associating the European avant-gardes with the formalist pursuit of autonomy, and insisting that the Latin American avant-gardes operate a critique of this pursuit by reconnecting the advanced tendencies in Western art to the realities of life on the global periphery.

[5] Roberts highlights how, since the 1960s, the unavoidable fact that the traditional values of art have been radically undermined by changing socioeconomic conditions has been answered in two directly opposed ways: by essentially doubling down on the need for art to continue to assert an aesthetic distance from the mass cultural forms that perpetually threaten to engulf it, and, on the other hand, by insisting on the need for art to "embed its techniques and modes of attention in modern forms of technology and the visual structures of a 'shared, popular culture'" ("On Autonomy" 25). It is this latter position that, in his view, has become the new cultural dominant, by way of a process in which "art is relativized as a series of strategies of intervention into social and artistic institutions and forms of everyday life" (25), becoming "a kind of low-level or micro-social practice" (25).

become one with life. The following chapters re-read the Argentine novel from the standpoint of this thesis.

THE ARGENTINE NOVEL, FROM THE 1920S AVANT-GARDES TO THE PRESENT

Ricardo Piglia has suggested that the early 20th century witnesses the emergence of "las grandes poéticas 'argentinas' de la novela" (*Las tres vanguardias* 13). The first two chapters of this dissertation study the processes set in motion by the two most significant novelists of that time, Macedonio Fernández and Roberto Arlt. The third focuses on Piglia himself, documenting the complex, multi-decade dialogue he establishes with his literary forebears.

While separated by more than a quarter century in age, Macedonio (1874-1952) and Arlt (1900-1942) both came to prominence as writers in the 1920s, producing many of their most important texts between the years 1922 and 1932.[6] Macedonio, who is conventionally referred to by his first name, was of upper-class origin, a lawyer by training, and an avid reader of Arthur Schopenhauer and William James. After contributing regularly to two seminal avant-garde literary journals (*Martín Fierro* and *Proa*) and participating in a series of important interventions into Buenos Aires cultural life, Macedonio began theorizing and writing the novel that would later be published as *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*.[7] He continued to write and revise it

[6] The first date marks Macedonio's initial contributions to the seminal avant-garde journal *Martín Fierro*, and the second marks the publication of Arlt's fourth and final novel, *El amor brujo*. By that time, Macedonio had published the only two monographs that were published in his lifetime: *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* (1929), which expounds the author's metaphysical doctrine, and *Papeles de Recienvenido* (1929), which compiles many of the short, humoristic texts Macedonio published in journals such as *Martín Fierro* and *Proa*. While both authors continued writing and publishing in the years following 1932, the previous decade represents their most intense (and most significant) interventions into Argentine cultural life.

[7] In the decades following his death, Macedonio was memorialized and mythologized by a number of important figures in Argentine cultural life, such as Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, Jorge Luis Borges, César Fernández Moreno, and Piglia. For a study of this myth-making process, see Todd Garth's 2001 article "Confused Oratory: Borges, Macedonio, and the Creation of the Mythological Author." For a thorough biographical study of Macedonio, which

during the final three decades of his life, leaving an expansive yet incomplete series of handwritten and typewritten manuscripts upon his death in 1952.[8] In his theoretical writings on the novel, and in the pages of his *Museo*, which was first published in 1967, Macedonio elaborates a vision of literature that paradoxically follows *both* of the above narratives. On the one hand, he imagines the possibility of a "Novela Salida a la Calle" (*Museo* 7) in which art would reconnect with everyday life: "[e]l público miraría nuestros 'jirones de arte,' escenas de novela ejecutándose en las calles, entreverándose a 'jirones de vida,' en veredas, puertas, domicilios, bares y creería ver 'vida'" (14). On the other hand, he also insists that the literary work must aspire to a relationship of absolute autonomy with respect to extra-textual reality: "o el arte está demás, o nada tiene que ver con la realidad" (qtd. in Del Barco 469). For Macedonio, in sum, literature must purify itself of any and every element originating in the outside world, yet it can also directly intervene into that world, abolishing its autonomous relationship to modern life, taking to the streets, and conquering the modern city.

Arlt, the son of Eastern European immigrants and a grade-school dropout, published four novels between the years 1926 and 1932. He began writing a daily column for the newspaper *El Mundo*. Both his novels and newspaper columns, known as *aguafuertes* or "etchings," which studied diverse aspects of everyday life in the modern metropolis of Buenos Aires, brought him fame and a relatively stable income as a professional writer. By the early 1930s, Arlt was one of the most prominent writers in Argentina, renowned for both his brash personality and the violent, frenzied style of his writings.[9] In his narrative fiction, Arlt develops an impure poetics in which a

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sets these "mythological" treatments of Macedonio in dialogue with the existing historical documentation of his life, see Álvaro Abós, *Macedonio Fernández: El escritor imposible* (2002).

[8] See Ana Camblong's "Estudio preliminar" to the 1993 critical edition of the *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* for a thorough discussion of the various manuscripts of the *Museo*.

[9] The most thorough biography of Arlt is Sylvia Saítta's *El escritor en el bosque de ladrillos*. Raúl Larra's classic 1950 study *Roberto Arlt: el torturado* is also helpful. While Larra narrates the story of Arlt's life by way of an often-

heterogeneous mixture of elements taken from the everyday realities of life in Buenos Aires, as well as from a diverse array of high- and low-cultural intertexts, come together in novels that attack art's pretension to autonomy by exploiting the equal availability of all things to cross over into the work of art. In Arlt, everything that Macedonio had sought to keep out of the literary text flows into it. Where Macedonio seeks to rigorously purify his novelistic art of any and all traces of everyday life, Arlt cobbles his novels together out of whatever materials he can find as he circulates through the modern city. In this sense, his approach to the novel and that of Macedonio stand in near-absolute opposition. As Beatriz Sarlo puts it, stressing the way in which Arlt sees the artistic potential in elements of urban life that remained outside of the purview of other artists of his time, Arlt constantly fixes his gaze on "las cosas que no podían ver los escritores que eran sus contemporáneos" (*La imaginación* 43).

Arlt accompanies this heterogeneous mixing of art and life, however, with an important reassertion of the privileged status of the traditional, third-person narrative voice of 19th-century realism. In Arlt, the realist narrator and his or her artistic strategies of registering reality in the pages of the novel stands in marked contrast to the characters' attempts to artfully fashion their own lives. For Arlt, the artist may incorporate all the stuff of urban life into the work of art, but when the characters who populate his novels—whom he describes as "individuos y mujeres de esta ciudad, a quienes yo he conocido" ("*Los siete locos*" 139)— try to carry out the inverse procedure, incorporating into their own lives the gestures and behaviors they learn in the popular theaters and movie houses of Buenos Aires, they are invariably condemned for doing so. In an important sense, the villains of each of Arlt's four novels are those men and women who seek to

problematic homology between the protagonists of Arlt's novels and Arlt himself, his biography was widely read and commented on by mid-century Arlt scholars and remains an important reference point in Arlt criticism.

actively incorporate art into their own lives. For Arlt, everything from urban life can be taken and repurposed in the modern work of art, but to do the opposite (to transfer techniques and behaviors from art back into life) leads invariably to perdition.

The respective literary interventions of Macedonio and Arlt are irreducible to either of the above accounts. Neither writer simply seeks to autonomize art from life, as in Greenberg's history of abstraction in modernist painting, nor to collapse the distance between the two, as in Bürger's study of the avant-garde project of reconnecting art to everyday life praxis. Their novels instead fuse these two narratives together. At times each author relies on a rigid separation between art from life, and at times each author seeks to efface this distinction. Their understandings of the relationship between art and life can be understood via the figure of a one-way street. In each case, traffic can flow in one way, but never in the other. For Macedonio, art can flow into life, taking to the street and conquering the modern city, but life must never be allowed to flow back into art: "[y]o quiero que el lector sepa siempre que está leyendo una novela y no viendo un vivir, no presenciando 'vida'" (*Museo* 37). For Arlt, on the other hand, the novel opens its doors to the urban sensorium, as well as to techniques appropriated from emergent cultural forms (namely, cinema), but art must not flow back into life.

These divergent approaches complicate prominent histories of modernist and avant-garde art such as those of Greenberg and Bürger, and they furthermore indicate the difficulty (indeed, the impossibility) of reducing the avant-gardes' treatment of the distinction between art and life to any single narrative. In recent decades, critics have often endeavored to channel the history of the avant-gardes in Argentina through one author or the other. If, for Francine Masiello, "Arlt sintetiza los proyectos más importantes de la vanguardia" (23), for Piglia, the entire history of avant-garde activity in Argentina originates in the humble pension-house rooms inhabited by

Macedonio: "[p]odemos concebir el cuarto de pensión de Macedonio como el primer lugar desde el cual se constituye el espacio de vanguardia en la literatura argentina" (*Las tres vanguardias* 77).[10]

The analyses of Macedonio and Arlt carried out in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation reject this either-or distinction, proposing that to understand the history of the avant-gardes in Argentina as primordially "Arltian" or "Macedonian" in nature is to misunderstand that history. The figure of the one-way street is proposed here to provide a means to understand their respective literary projects, but, when they are set against each other, each author guides the flow of traffic in a different direction. To combine the two into a single two-way avenue—where art can flow into life and vice versa—would constitute a significant distortion of each of their respective contributions.

The third chapter of this dissertation studies the legacy of their works, as well as the legacy of the two narratives of the history of modernism and the avant-garde sketched above, in the narrative fiction of Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017). In the words of Idelber Avelar, Piglia has attempted in his essays and fictional texts "to make of Macedonio Fernández and Roberto Arlt the two major pillars of the modern in Argentine fiction" (86). Chapter 3 divides his literary production into two periods, the first "neo-Arltian" and the second "neo-Macedonian," studying

[10] Piglia makes this affirmation as part of a cycle of lectures delivered in 1990 and recently published as *Las tres vanguardias*. Nearly a decade earlier, in his first novel, *Respiración artifical* (1980), Piglia famously has the character Emilio Renzi voice an understanding of literary modernity in which Arlt occupies the position of originator, in contrast to Jorge Luis Borges, whose literary gaze is directed backwards, toward the 19th century: "Borges debe ser leído, si se quiere entender de qué se trata, en el interior del sistema de la literatura argentina del siglo XIX, cuyas líneas fundamentales, con sus conflictos, dilemas y contradicciones, él viene a cerrar, a clausurar. De modo que Borges es anacrónico, pone fin, mira hacia el siglo XIX. El que abre, el que inaugura, es Roberto Arlt. Arlt empieza de nuevo: es el único escritor verdaderamente moderno que produjo la literatura argentina del siglo XX" (*Respiración* 132-133). Chapter 3 addresses the transition in Piglia's essays and narrative fiction, which occurs over the course of the 1980s and 90s, from a vision of Argentine literary modernity grounded in Arlt to one grounded in Macedonio.

how Piglia returns to both Arlt and Macedonio at a moment in which the mid-century canonization and institutionalization of their works had made them visible as historical, rather than contemporary, figures. Significantly, Bürger's 1974 *Theory of the Avant-Garde* refers to the movements it studies as the *historical* avant-gardes, reflecting their passage into a historical past that is increasingly removed from present-day conditions of artistic production. In those years, one could just as easily speak of a "historical modernism" in reference to the tradition of modernist painting studied by Greenberg, which by that time had been absorbed by the museum, the art market, and the academy, thereby consecrating its canonical status yet also raising the possibility of the historical supersession of the modernist pursuit of autonomy. Piglia's arrival on the Buenos Aires cultural scene in the 1960s and 70s, then, coincides with this becoming-historical of the works of Arlt and Macedonio, of the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, and of modernism as a whole.

Piglia's critical essays and narrative fiction reflect on this epochal transition at length. His writings do not, however, simply bear witness to the passage into history of the writers of the 1920s and of the major narratives concerning the relationship between art and modern life that guided their literary production. They also register their rebirth in new, expanded histories of artistic modernity that pick up the pieces at a time when neither the pursuit of autonomy nor the avant-garde dream of reconnecting art with everyday life seemed sufficient for telling the story of modernism in the arts. The reading of Piglia presented here situates him between two such narratives. The first is the story of a reborn, revolutionary avant-garde, which emerges in postwar Europe, in the early essays of Roland Barthes and in the works of Italian poet and theorist Edoardo Sanguineti, among other places. In the wake of the neutralization of the revolutionary aspirations of the historical avant-garde movements in postwar consumerist societies, these and

other writers endeavor to find a new way forward for the revolutionary dreams of the avant-garde via a radical re-thinking of the relationship between artistic production, economic production, and revolutionary politics. The second narrative is that of postmodernism, especially as it takes shape in writings by cultural theorist Fredric Jameson that seek to register and react to what Jameson views as the real subsumption of the work of art, and of cultural labor, into the machinations of global capital. This narrative gains steam through the 1970s and 80s, as artists and theorists around the world seek to register a major sea change in which the modernist pursuit of purity seemed to have ceded to a broad-based tendency toward the mixing of everything that modernism, in its will to autonomy, aspired to keep separate.

Piglia's literary project can be thought of as a decades-long endeavor to successively work through the implications of these two emergent narratives (first that of a revolutionary avant-garde, then that of postmodernism) by articulating them into comprehensive re-readings of his Argentine forebears. As Chapter 3 will show, in each case Piglia attempts, in effect, to follow the "traffic" of the Arltian and Macedonian one-way streets, traveling down them as far as he can go, but also endeavoring to carve out minimal possibilities of reverse travel in the directions that are closed off by each author.

Piglia's discovery of a revolutionary impulse at the heart of Arlt's literary project centers on an understanding of literary creation as plagiarism. For Piglia, the way that Arlt cobbles his texts together out of a heterogeneous mixture of materials encountered in urban life lays bare the fact that the supposedly original works of artistic genius that are celebrated by the dominant bourgeois culture are, in fact, nothing other than a patchwork of purloined statements taken from the texts of others. In works such as "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" and his first novel, *Respiración artificial*, Piglia articulates this insight into a negative poetics of citation in which the literary text

becomes a vast collage of appropriated statements. While this poetics of citation aims to free literary production from the notions of originality and genius that form the foundations of bourgeois aesthetics, it does so by dissolving the supposedly unique creations of the bourgeois author into a heteronomous mixture of historically-sedimented linguistic materials. In this sense, Piglia continues Arlt's endeavor to blur the line between art and life by cancelling traditional distinctions between purportedly artistic and non-artistic materials. He also, like Arlt, couples this line-blurring with an important reassertion of autonomy, but of a very different sort than Arlt's defense of the writer's authority to artistically transfer the stuff of modern life into the work of art. For Piglia, in contrast, it is the work of art itself that is able to conquer an autonomous standpoint with respect to a social existence that is thoroughly saturated by ideology. Building on the work of Louis Althusser, for whom ideology is coterminous with lived reality itself (i.e., there can be no "outside" of ideology), Piglia nonetheless defends art's capacity to pry itself apart from, and allude to, this thoroughly ideological reality. Art, in its capacity to make visible or perceptible the very workings of ideology, is thus capable of producing a distinct form of (non-conceptual) "knowledge" of the world that stands apart from both the theoretical knowledge produced by science and the ideologically saturated realm of practical, everyday knowledge.

In Argentina, the military dictatorship in power from 1976 to 1983, and the subsequent transition to market-based neoliberal democracy, mark the historical eclipse of the project for a revolutionary avant-garde that guided Piglia's early fictions. In the wake of these epochal shifts, Piglia turns to the writings of Macedonio Fernández in an endeavor to preserve the possibility of articulating an artistic response to these new "postmodern" conditions. This return takes him back to what might be thought of as the logical starting point of the Macedonian "Novela Salida

a la Calle": the conspiracy, in which the plan to take to the streets and intervene into modern life from the standpoint of art is formulated by a small group of artist-conspirators. The conspiracy-form becomes the bedrock of Piglia's renewed understanding of the historical avant-gardes as a conspiratorial mode of artistic and political activity that targets the entirety of the dominant liberal-bourgeois social order. It also forms the foundation for his second novel, *La ciudad ausente* (1992), which constructs a fictional genealogy of conspirators that connects Macedonio (who appears as a central character) to a philosophical tradition that stretches from Friedrich Nietzsche to Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault. In Piglia's novel and in his writings on the avant-garde, the conspiracy designates a conceptual standpoint from which the artist can occupy a minimal position of autonomy on the interior of an increasingly absolute neoliberal social order. If liberalism is grounded in notions of transparency, consensus, and general equivalence, to secretly conspire against liberalism and articulate alternate networks of sociability preserves the promise of resisting a social order that, in the waning decades of the 20th century, threatens to subsume the entirety of social existence under its logic.

Piglia's readers have tended to emphasize continuities between these two phases, viewing them in terms of the logical unfolding of a single literary project. The distinction between the two Piglias studied in Chapter 3 resists this assimilation, slowly arriving at a key point of divergence concerning *when* the moment of autonomy occurs in the artistic process. In the first, "neo-Arltian" Piglia, autonomy comes at the end, at the moment of consumption, when the work of art dislocates the ideological gaze of the reader or viewer and makes visible the formal workings of ideology. The process of artistic production, on the other hand, is fully immersed in general processes of social production: the techniques of the artist and the techniques of the laborer are not qualitatively distinct, and the artist does not labor apart from society in some sort

of artistic ivory tower, but rather, in the words of Arlt himself, "entre los ruidos de un edificio social que se desmorona inevitablemente" (*Obras I*: 386). In the second, "neo-Macedonian" Piglia, on the other hand, the moment of autonomy comes first, prior to the production of the work, in the artist's move to create the conspiracy. Through a reading of artists such as Macedonio and Marcel Duchamp, Piglia reconceives this possibility of conspiratorial autonomy, which he links to the overarching historical project of the avant-garde, as a conceptual question of how to "construir la mirada artística y no la obra artística" (*Teoría* 39). Autonomy is conquered beforehand, by formulating a plan that takes shape prior to the work itself and aspires to produce alterations in what Piglia calls "la organización material de la cultura" (*Teoría* 36), that is, the network of institutional conditions that define the ways in which individuals use and value works of art.

As was the case with the divergent approaches of Macedonio and Arlt, I argue here that to understand these two approaches to autonomy in terms of the logical unfolding of a single artistic project is to misunderstand them. In the first approach, the procedure through which art makes the workings of ideology perceptible is predicated on the interplay between the completed work of art and the reader. The conspiracy, on the other hand, in its privileging of what might be thought of as the conceptual pre-history of the work of art (the construction of the conspiratorial *mirada* or standpoint) tends toward an increasing demotion of the importance of the work itself. The list of titles of possible novels that appears in one of the opening prologues of Macedonio's *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, including "La Novela que Comienza," "La Novela escrita por

sus Personajes," and "La Novela Salida a la Calle" (7) would, in a sense, be more significant than the finished novels themselves.[11]

The concluding pages of this dissertation address this divergence through a dialogue between Piglia and Jorge Luis Borges. In the prologue to the 1941 edition of *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, Borges famously questions the lucidity of writing the sorts of vast, detailed novels that rose to prominence in 19th-century literature, preferring instead to distill them down to a core idea, for which the Borgesian literary text would serve as a supplemental commentary: "[d]esvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario" (*Ficciones* 12). This procedure, of doing away with the work (the 500-page novel) in favor of a commentary on the idea that could perhaps form the core of such a novel, is structurally similar to Piglia's theory of the conspiracy in that it shifts priority away from the work itself and toward the construction of the critical gaze that either precedes it (Piglia) or comes after it in the form of

[11] César Aira clearly recognizes this tendency toward the demotion of the work of art in his reflections on the 20th century avant-gardes in his programmatic 1998 essay "La nueva escritura." For Aira, the autonomization of the literary field and the consequent legitimation of the social status of the writer in modern society "[pone] en peligro la historicidad del arte" ("La nueva escritura" 166) by congealing artistic form into ossified, easily-reproducible genre models and thereby breaking "la dialéctica forma-contenido que hace a lo artístico del arte" (166). The avant-gardes, then, seek to reanimate this frozen dialectic via the creation of new procedures. As Aira goes on to explain, this proliferation of new procedures for making art goes hand-in-hand with a radical devaluation of the finished work: "Los grandes artistas [vanguardistas] del siglo XX no son los que hicieron obra, sino los que inventaron procedimientos para que las obras se hicieran solas, o no se hicieran. ¿Para qué necesitamos obras? ¿Quién quiere otra novela, otro cuadro, otra sinfonía? ¡Como si no hubiera bastantes ya!" (166). Notably, in an interview published in 2009, Aira roundly rejects his own words, questioning the validity of this understanding of the avant-garde: "Durante una época, hace unos veinte años, yo no abría la boca si no era para hablar del Procedimiento: decía que la función del artista no era crear obras sino crear el procedimiento para que las obras se hicieran solas, que 'la poesía debe ser hecha por todos, no por uno,' y muchas cosas más por el estilo, que sonaban bien pero no tenían mucho sentido. Supongo que lo decía para hacerme el interesante. Por supuesto, nunca puse en práctica nada de eso. Seguía escribiendo mis novelas, como las sigo escribiendo, sin procedimiento alguno y sin esperanzas de que algún día lleguen a escribirse solas" ("Se necesita mucha sinceridad" 48). This contradictory vision of avant-garde artistic production could provide the framework for an approach to Aira's literary project similar to the dual reading of Piglia proposed here, perhaps situating Aira between two of his foundational theoretical referents: Marcel Duchamp (the "creator of procedures" *par excellence*) and Gilles Deleuze.

commentary (Borges). Piglia's manner of resolving this problem, which takes shape in *La ciudad ausente*, is to link the "perfectly exposited ideas" at the heart of Borges's approach to fiction into an open-ended series of stories or *relatos*. This use of the series allows Piglia to retain the Borgesian emphasis on concise storytelling, while also allowing for a "postmodern" approach to storytelling in which an ever-proliferating (and potentially infinite) series of *relatos* continues to open up new lines of flight in excess of an increasingly monolithic assemblage of social forces, or what Piglia describes as the "nuevo contexto unificador" (*Teoría* 53) marked by the historical triumph of neoliberalism and postmodernist culture.

General Theoretical Horizon: Jacques Rancière and the Aesthetic Regime of Art

This dissertation was researched and written more than three decades after Jameson published his foundational 1984 essay on the cultural logic of postmodernism. To employ an awkward accumulation of prefixes that will not appear again in these pages, it is equally "post-revolutionary-avant-garde" and "post-post-modernist." Its pages ask what is to be made of these newer narratives, and also of the older narratives of modernism and the avant-garde that underpin them, at a time when postmodernism itself, as well as the revolutionary fervor of the 60s and 70s, have passed into the realm of the historical. This is to say that all of the chapters are guided by a suspicion that *none* of the above-mentioned narratives can be assumed to retain a critical purchase on the present, nor can they continue to be relied on as categorial frameworks for understanding the art of the past century. This suspicion is enunciated by John Roberts in the opening page of his 2015 monograph *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, where he observes that "the international landscape of art's production and reception is largely unrecognizable from twenty-five years ago" (ix) and goes on to explain that, in this respect,

> a great deal of art criticism and art history is now patently inadequate to the transformed horizons and thinking of contemporary art and culture. In fact what is at stake, more broadly, is a complete re-periodization of art in the twentieth century in order to shift its reified narratives and categories and their dreary intimacy with the scholarship of museum and market alike. (ix)

Roberts's recognition that the major narratives used to understand the avant-garde and modernism have taken on a reified quality and are no longer adequate for understanding the art of the past century (and of the present) echoes a common sentiment in Latin American literary studies. The past two decades have witnessed a series of extended discussions of the exhaustion of not only the canonical modern(ist) understandings of Latin American literary history, but furthermore the entire conceptual vocabulary that has been employed in the theoretical discourse on modernity.[12]

In response to the dual necessities named by Roberts (to find a theoretical standpoint capable of doing justice to the "transformed horizons and thinking" of the present, and to re-periodize the artistic production of the past century), the following chapters elaborate an extended dialogue with the revised history of modernism proposed by French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Over the past three decades, Rancière has carried out a comprehensive re-reading of the art, literature, and aesthetic theory of the past two centuries, repeatedly questioning traditional distinctions (between, for example, realism and modernism, or modernism and postmodernism) in favor of a unified understanding of modern art and literature

[12] See, for example, Brett Levinson, *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American "Boom" in the Neoliberal Marketplace* (2001); Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (2001), and Patrick Dove, *Literature and "Interregnum": Globalization, War, and the Crisis of Sovereignty in Latin America* (2016).

as a single, continually-unfolding movement that emerges in the 18th century and endures up to the present. As this dissertation project took shape, Rancière's work took on particular interest due to the way in which it addresses Roberts's call for a critical revision of the "reified narratives and categories" that have underwritten critical reflection on modern art and literature in Argentina, Latin America, and throughout the West. This includes Rancière's rejection of Greenbergian modernism in his 2011 monograph *Aisthesis*, where he comprehensively refutes the "[i]nfluential histories and philosophies of artistic modernity [that] identify it with the conquest of autonomy by each art" (xii); his characterization of the categories of the avant-garde and of postmodernity as "[not] very enlightening" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 20) means of understanding the new forms of art that emerge in the 19th and 20th centuries in *The Politics of Aesthetics*; and his career-long endeavor to work through the implications of the revolutionary approaches to art and literature forwarded by key figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, and Louis Althusser, among others.

Rancière bases his understanding of artistic modernity in a slow, epochal transition that takes place in 18th- and 19th-century art and aesthetic theory. This transition, which Gabriel Rockhill has described as a "quiet revolution" (1) in contradistinction to the discontinuities, dramatic breaks, and cataclysmic events that characterize historical change in the works of Michel Foucault, drives a wedge between what Rancière refers to as two distinct regimes of art. The term "regime," for Rancière, designates the system of relationships between the ways in which artists make art, the ways in which society at large recognizes their work *as art*, and the ways in which both artistic production and its social reception are conceptualized. The target of this quiet revolution, which in Rancière's diverse writings on art and literature stretches back at least as far as Giambattista Vico's study of the origins of poetry in his *Scienza Nova* (1725), is

what Rancière calls the "representative regime of the arts." This regime is grounded in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which defines poetry as the imitation of men in action and establishes a place for the poet in the community as a member of society with a valid, socially-legitimated occupation: the production of well-formed fictions made to edify the rest of the community. As Oliver Davis explains, Rancière's vision of the representative regime is grounded in his distinct understanding of the Aristotelian principle of mimesis and its implications for the production and reception of art. Contrary to the common consideration of mimesis as "the demand that copies resemble their originals" (135), for Rancière, as Davis explains, "mimesis is above all the principle which allows for certain practices to exist as arts by specifying that their products are to be seen as 'imitations' rather than as products in the ordinary sense" (135). The principle of mimesis, in other words, has to do with the delimitation of a realm of activity with a legitimate place in the community, yet whose products (works of art) are judged and appreciated by an entirely different set of norms than the utilitarian concerns that dictate whether things like shoes or chairs are well made or not. The question of *what* art imitates can be answered in diverse manners (nature, Platonic ideal forms, insuperable works such as Homer's *Iliad* or Virgil's *Aeneid*), but the foundational importance of Aristotle's *Poetics*, for Rancière, lies in the way in which it establishes a place for art in the community, and provides a conceptual language through which the products of that activity become visible *as art*.

The representative regime reaches its apogee in European neoclassicism, as the original precepts of Aristotle's *Poetics* are progressively expanded into a comprehensive system of axioms dictating what sorts of artistic mediums, genres, and styles are adequate for the artistic treatment of different types of subject matter. The Aristotelian distinction between the use of tragedy in poetry for elevated or "noble" subjects and comedy for common or "vulgar" subjects

paves the way for the development of a massive architectonic framework that stretches across the arts (in the plural), as poets, sculptors, painters, and musicians, in dialogue with the theorists who conceptualize their work, produce rules that allow for the production of well-formed and clearly discernable works of art. With neoclassicism, each art gains its own area of legitimacy, paradigmatically in the work of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön* (1767), where poetry is delegated the imitation of actions taking place across time, while painting must restrict itself to capturing in spatial form the most expressive moment of a story or action. In this way, certain subjects *must* be treated in certain manners by painters, sculptors, or poets in order for their work to be appreciable as a painting, a sculpture, or a poem, and the representative regime takes shape as a vast system of necessary relationships between subjects and the forms in which they must be represented across the various artistic mediums. If it follows these rules, the play written by the poet, or the marble bust made by the sculptor, should ideally be as easily recognizable in the community (as well-formed works of art) as the shoe made by the cobbler or the chair made by the furniture maker.

Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, in parallel with the emergence of democratic systems of government in Europe and the Americas, this representative regime is progressively undone by which Rancière calls the "aesthetic regime of art." The aesthetic regime progressively liquidates the strict hierarchies of mediums, subject matters, and genres that had previously structured artistic production and made paintings, sculptures, plays, and lyric poems visible in the community as art. It furthermore replaces the architectonic framework of *the arts* with a singular understanding of *art*—poetry is no longer restricted to imitating the temporal sequence of actions, nor is painting confined to the spatial logic of the expressive moment. In the aesthetic regime, a newfound creative freedom is accompanied by the disappearance of

everything that had previously distinguished the poet's way of writing a play from, say, the carpenter's way of making a chair or the cobbler's way of making a shoe. Artistic freedom goes hand-in-hand with the dissolution of any and all standards for defining the social place of the artist. "[T]he heart of the problem," as Rancière puts it, is that "[t]he aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 23). The aesthetic regime replaces the necessary relationship between form and content with one of absolute contingency: the equal, "democratic" availability of all things to partake in the aesthetic mode of experience (that is, any subject can protagonize an aesthetic experience, and any object can be the object of such an experience) is complemented by the absolute indifference of the form in which they come together in this experience. Everything can be art, but nothing is necessarily so.

For Rancière, this contradiction "between necessary form and indifferent content" (*Mute Speech* 154) comes to guide the most consequential artistic projects of the 19th and 20th centuries. While many artists and theorists have sought to resolve the contradiction by recuperating elements of the representative regime, insisting, for example, on the importance of well-constructed fictions (Borges) or rigorous understandings of medium-specificity (Greenberg), Rancière privileges a series of artistic endeavors in which this contradiction is stripped bare and situated as the guiding problematic in works that seek to elaborate "an art that is capable of playing with its own idea and creating a work out of its own contradiction" (*Mute Speech* 37).

Rancière famously privileges a progression of canonical figures, largely hailing from the Franco-Germanic tradition, in his reflections on art in the aesthetic regime, returning repeatedly to key names such as Friedrich Schiller, Gustave Flaubert, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Marcel

Proust. And, while his work has been widely translated, with at least twenty Spanish-language editions of his works published over the past twenty-plus years by publishers throughout the Spanish-speaking world, and dozens (if not hundreds) of scholarly articles devoted to his work, much ground remains to be covered regarding the implications of his revision of the narratives and categories of aesthetic modernity for the Latin American context. This dissertation follows in the footsteps of endeavors such as a 2014 issue of the journal *parallax* dedicated to rethinking scholarly understandings of aesthetic modernity in Latin America in light of Rancière's critical revision of the categories and narratives that have traditionally underpinned the study of modern art and literature throughout the West.[13] Taking the Argentine novel of the past century as its primary subject, this dissertation aims to contribute to this endeavor via a sustained re-reading of the works of three foundational authors, using Rancière's work as a starting point and working through the implications, strengths, and potential weaknesses of his vision of artistic modernity.

INTERLUDE: ROBERTO ARLT IN THE AESTHETIC REGIME

Before shifting to the literary project of Macedonio Fernández, the subject of Chapter 1, a brief discussion of the understanding of literature conveyed in a pair of key documents written by Roberto Arlt will help illustrate the possibilities opened up by the Rancièrian conceptualization of the aesthetic regime. The first of these documents, the strident prologue to

[13] From that volume, see especially: Silvia L. López, "Beyond the Visible, the Audible and the Sayable: Rethinking Aesthetic Modernity in Latin America," which introduces the issue's theme and provides a general overview of Rancière's work on the aesthetic regime; Graciela Montaldo, "Dialogues in Theory: Emancipation and Emancipatory Acts," which surveys the impact of Rancière's ideas among Latin American artists, students, and intellectuals; Ignacio Sánchez Prado, "The Limitations of the Sensible: Reading Rancière in Mexico's Failed Transition," which questions the applicability of Rancière's conceptual vocabulary to the political and cultural history of Mexico; and Bruno Bosteels, "Global Aesthetics and Its Discontents," which critiques Rancière for failing to adequately account for the processes of primitive accumulation that took place through European colonization during the 16th to 18th centuries, and which created the conditions that made the Rancièrian quiet revolution possible.

Arlt's third novel, *Los lanzallamas* (1931), elaborates a powerful, materialist critique of still-prevalent currents of aesthetic idealism that continued to identify literature as an autonomous activity of the human spirit that is detached from material circumstances. Arlt's prologue annihilates this detachment, placing the modern writer instead at the heart of a crumbling social edifice. Using the novels of Gustave Flaubert as a strategic foil, and describing them as "panorámicos lienzos" (*Obras I*: 386) that mark the apex of stylistic refinement, Arlt reveals that the capacity to write with such refinement is a product of the author's class position: "[p]ara hacer estilo son necesarias comodidades, rentas, vida holgada" (385). The pursuit of a refined style requires free time to dedicate oneself to spiritual pursuits such as literature. For Arlt, who pounds away at his novels on his Underwood typewriter in the noisy newsroom between deadlines for his daily column, the development of such a style would be impossible because to write, in his case, is instead to contract a sort of debt, stealing time away from "la obligación de la columna cotidiana" (385). Wearing his stylistic poverty as a badge of honor and encouraging others to follow his lead by making a virtue of economic necessity—"[d]igo esto para estimular a los principiantes en la vocación," (385), he writes—, Arlt's prologue culminates in a triumphalist vision of the writer of the future that draws on the figures of Argentine boxer Luis Ángel Firpo, who sent heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey flying out of the ring with a violent right cross to the jaw in a 1923 title fight, and Rubén Darío, who famously proclaimed the masculine fecundity of the modern poet in the closing words of his prologue to *Prosas profanas*:

> El futuro es nuestro, por prepotencia de trabajo. Crearemos nuestra literatura, no conversando continuamente de literatura, sino escribiendo en orgullosa soledad libros que encierran la violencia de un "cross" a la mandíbula. Sí, un libro tras otro, y "que los eunucos bufen."

> El porvenir es triunfalmente nuestro.
>
> Nos lo hemos ganado con sudor de tinta y rechinar de dientes, frente a la "Underwood," que golpeamos con manos fatigados hora tras hora, hora tras hora… (386-387).[14]

The manifesto-like quality of Arlt's prologue, which culminates in this incorporation of his personal, "solitary" approach to literature into that of a collective of tireless writers forging the literature of the future from the interstices of society's productive base, has made it a focal point for critics who have regularly employed it as a key for reconstructing the conceptual framework of Arlt's literary project as a whole. As Piglia (whose reading of Arlt's prologue will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) explains in an early essay, Arlt aims in his prologue at nothing less than the revolutionary overturning of the system of values that supports "esa moral aristocrática que se niega a reconocer las determinaciones económicas que rigen toda lectura, los códigos de clase que rigen toda lectura" ("Roberto Arlt: Una crítica" 22). In the same revolutionary vein, Fernando Rosenberg's monograph *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America* (2006) detects in Arlt's prologue the bases for a new literature that is able to channel the "potentially liberating conditions of thought in the era of mass production and communication" (47) by totally integrating literary production into the "fast, chaotic, energetic pace of production" (47) of the newspaper office, which in turn stands as a microcosm of modern society itself. For Rosenberg, Arlt's literature is grounded in this absolute collapse of the critical distance that had erstwhile guaranteed the writer's autonomy: his literature is born of "the pure simultaneity of a total present that doesn't allow for contemplative distance" (47). Arlt's attacks

[14] For comparison, Darío's prologue concludes with the following mandate: "Y, la primera ley, creador: crear. Bufe el eunuco; cuando una musa te dé un hijo, queden las otras ocho encinta" (11).

on the literary establishment, from this perspective, can be understood to lay the groundwork for a literature that rises from the ashes of "the modern autonomous aesthetic and its subject" (45). The novelist, modeling himself on the modern reporter and totally enmeshed in a modern society that Rosenberg describes in terms of a sort of vast, Deleuzian "writing machine" (47), is able to channel his work through this fervent world of accelerating energy flows, encountering lines of flight that allow him to momentarily outstrip the pace of the voracious social machine itself.

These readings of the Arltian prologue stand in marked contrast to the visions of Arlt produced in an initial cycle of critical revision that took place over the course of the 1950s and 60s, a period during which Arlt's works were widely re-published, as well as progressively incorporated into the institutional structures of the Argentine literary field. In those years, key figures such as David and Ismael Viñas, Adolfo Prieto, and Oscar Masotta set Arlt's literary corpus into a triangular relation with both the national literary tradition and with key referents in postwar thought such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[15] The Arlt that emerges in their readings is less revolutionary than contradictory in nature, in the sense that, underlying and perpetually accompanying the stridency exhibited in texts such as the prologue to *Los lanzallamas*, he is shown repeatedly to remain beholden to the very system of values that he seeks to overcome. As David Viñas put it in a classic text on the relation between Argentine literature and the nation's political reality, Arlt's iconoclastic attack on the literary elite is always accompanied by "un movimiento ascensional … veloz y purificador" (71) in which the author, unable to transcend his petty bourgeois origins (in an important sense, he is made of the same

[15] This cycle can be thought to begin in earnest with the 1954 publication of the second issue of the literary journal *Contorno*, dedicated to the legacy of Arlt, and culminate in the publication of Masotta's *Sexo y traición en Roberto Arlt* eleven years later. For a critical overview of this period in Argentine intellectual history, see William Katra, *Contorno: Literary Engagement in Post-Peronist Argentina*, as well as Sebastián Carassai, "The Formation of a Post-Peronist Generation: Intellectuals and Politics in Argentina through the Lens of *Contorno* (1953-1959)."

stuff as those authors he critiques), redoubles his faith in the power of literature and its capacity to transform his life circumstances.[16] He attacks those he perceives to be at the top, not out of a desire to invalidate the social position of the writer *as such*, but rather to propose a new authorial figure who will rise triumphant. He aims, in short, to affirm the social status of the bourgeois professional writer that he has become.

Readers such as Piglia and Rosenberg do not ignore the presence of countercurrents in Arlt's discourse that cut against the revolutionary flow. They do, however, tend to shift the motivations for these equivocations away from the literary project itself and toward a cluster of socio-historical causes that mark the limits of Arlt's iconoclastic attack on the literary institution. Rosenberg, for example, describes the moments when Arlt appears to resist the dissolution of the privileged position of the author as compensatory machista gestures that are unfortunate and ethically reprehensible, yet ultimately of secondary importance: "[t]he potential lack of individuation brought about by his position inside the writing machine is unsettling for the writer and thus is counterpointed in this prologue, quite pathetically, by [] affirmation[s] of force and stubborn macho energy" (47). Viñas and members of his generation carry out similar procedures, passing an essentially historicist judgment on the political significance of Arlt by positioning him as a representative of a generation of left-wing authors who, despite their increasingly radical political convictions, were unable to detach themselves from a still-too-bourgeois approaches to literature. The critic's task becomes equivalent to detecting these contradictions, in which Arlt

[16] Viñas draws special attention to Arlt's tendency to set words taken from the popular dialects of Buenos Aires in quotation marks, thus preserving a degree of difference between his literary prose and the everyday speech of the city's popular classes. This technique, as Viñas sees it, manifests Arlt's fear that he might fall out of his perch in the middle class and descend to their level: his status is that of a middle class writer "humillad[o] por las academias, el prestigio y el poder" (72), who finds the lives and language of the masses seductive and powerful, yet remains perpetually "temoroso de 'caer' y quedarse adherido en ese nivel" (72). Piglia's readings of Arlt, and especially the analysis of Arlt carried out in his first novel, *Respiración artificial*, seeks to overturn this condemnation of Arlt's literary language by unearthing a thought of the radical heterogeneity of the national language (and of the nation's *literary language*) at work in his novels.

continues to be beholden to the autonomous aesthetic and its bourgeois-individualist subject, and pointing to ways in which, at the present moment of reading, these contradictions can be made manifest and thus ultimately transcended.[17] They situate Arlt, in effect, at a prior moment in the development of a collective, revolutionary consciousness.

Rancière's work on art and literature in the aesthetic regime offers a means of reexamining this procedure, whereby the critic identifies bourgeois or non-revolutionary attributes of Arlt's literary project and situates them on the outside of that project, figuratively separating the wheat from the chaff. For, as Rancière emphasizes, the art and literature of the past century is characterized by an irresolvable contradiction that is internal to the aesthetic regime itself, in which moments of iconoclasm and destruction of critical distance are perpetually accompanied by endeavors to redefine the specificity of artistic practices and reaffirm the necessity of the artist's labor. In this sense, what Viñas conceives as Arlt's fear of falling down the ladder of social classes might instead be viewed in terms of a properly literary set of concerns relating to his perception of the threat caused by his systematic weakening of the link between art and non-art. Rosenberg's description of the post-autonomous standpoint of an Arltian literature that "[lacks] the possibility of separation between subject and object" (47), for its part, might be complemented by an investigation of the moments when this collapse of critical distance between the writing subject and the society he represents in the pages of his novels becomes visible to the author as a problem that his literature must confront.

These are precisely the concerns addressed in a second key document, an *aguafuerte* written by Arlt in late 1929 to accompany the release of his second novel, *Los siete locos*. That

[17] For a thoroughgoing critique of this procedure, in which the further-developed consciousness of the leftist critic reveals potentially revolutionary implications that remain latent in the discourse of the writer, see Analía Capdevila, "Para una lectura política de la traición de Astier."

column, whose title is that of the novel ("*Los siete locos"*), invites a reading along similar lines to the prologue of *Los lanzallamas*. It too offers a general explication of the author's understanding of literature, and its pages, like those of the prologue to Arlt's third novel, reflect precisely on what it means to write novels at a time of revolutionary upheaval, in which modern individuals live in a state of desperation caused not so much by poverty and material lack as by "la desorientación que, después de la gran guerra, ha revolucionado la conciencia de los hombres, dejándolos vacíos de ideales y esperanzas" (139). Writing from the standpoint of this condition of flux and moral indifferentiation, in which the author feels himself implicated, Arlt proceeds to articulate a broad-based defense of a notion of critical distance inherited from 19th-century novelists such as Dickens and Dostoyevsky (to name two of his avowed masters). He grounds his work as a novelist in techniques of rigorous observation that of necessity require an assertion of separation between author and character: if the characters of his novel are nothing other than "individuos y mujeres de esta ciudad" (139), they are *not* to be identified with the author himself: "A mí, como autor, estos individuos no me son simpáticos" (141), Arlt insists on this point later in the same column, stressing the obligation he feels to document "lo que piensan estos anormales, lo que sienten, lo que sufren, lo que sueñan" (141), again marking an important gulf separating himself, the author, from the characters whose lives he meticulously observes on the streets of Buenos Aires and then documents in his novels. If it is the author's task to momentarily feel himself become one with his characters—"todo autor es esclavo durante un momento de sus personajes" (141)—Arlt repeatedly affirms the distance separating himself from them, establishing this distance as the foundation of his novelistic art.

Arlt's *aguafuerte* employs a conceptual vocabulary derived largely from the literature of 19th-century realism, incorporating notions of critical distance, observation, documentation,

reflection, and representation, into an overarching objective of faithfully representing the experiences of "los hombres de este siglo" (141). And, while readers have generally sought to define his novels' relationship to a national realist tradition embodied in relatively mediocre novels by writers such as Manuel Gálvez as an essentially critical one, in which his modernist or avant-garde novelistic practices overcome or transcend a moribund aesthetic form, his 1929 column suggests that, rather than an iconoclastic attack on the realist novel, what is at stake is a defense of its condition of possibility in times when it is threatened by the revolutionary dynamics described by Rosenberg and others. It is in this sense that Analía Capdevila speaks of a process where, in the pages of Arlt's novels, "*la modernización del género novelesco* en nuestro país [tiene que ver con] una importante inflexión de la tradición realista" ("Las novelas" 241; emphasis in original). This inflection (rather than critique or destruction), which in Rancièrian terms can be conceived in terms of a renewed defense of the singularity of the novelistic art in the context of its potential dissolution into general social productivity, is neither a regressive defense of bourgeois aesthetics, nor a manifestation of unsettlement made by an author who finds himself enmeshed in the ever-accelerating rhythms of social production. It is, rather, a constitutive moment of a literary project that equally encompasses both the iconoclastic annihilation of notions of critical distance of the prologue to *Los lanzallamas* and the recuperation of such notions in the *aguafuerte* marking the publication of *Los siete locos*.

The following chapters read the novels of Macedonio Fernández, Roberto Arlt, and Ricardo Piglia following this basic framework, situating them within the Rancièrian periodizing category of the aesthetic regime of art and studying how they negotiate the contradictory principles of absolute freedom and absolute indifference described by Rancière. While Arlt embraces the absolute freedom to incorporate anything and everything he comes across in the

modern city into the pages of his novels, he finds himself needing to elaborate a "representational" defense of the novelist's place in society. And if Macedonio asserts the capacity of literature to take to the street and transform everyday life, he also finds himself needing to reassert rigorous principles of medium-specificity and autonomy. Piglia, finally, in radicalizing certain aspects of Arlt and Macedonio's respective literary projects, capitalizes on key elements of the Rancièrian quiet revolution, yet must also seek out new means of understanding the specificity of art in the absence of, as Rancière puts it, "any pragmatic criterion for isolating [art's] singularity."

Chapter 1: Art, Life, and the Museum of the Novel: Macedonio Fernández's Avant-Garde Poetics

Macedonio Fernández formulated two programs for modern art over the course of his life. Elements of these two programs can be found in a body of writing spread across his nine-volume, posthumously published *Obras completas,* as well as two monographs published during his lifetime, multiple editions of his unfinished novel *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, and a diverse array of shorter texts dating from the late-19th century to his death in 1952. The two programs intersect in his novel, which will henceforth be referred to as the *Museo*. In the novel's pages, they are set in paradoxical relation to one another.

The first is a program of institutional critique. In a series of public interventions into Buenos Aires literary life, as well as in the pages of his *Museo* and in a series of humorous texts published in the pages of the major journals of the Argentine avant-garde, Macedonio systematically lays bare the framework of the Argentine literary institution. For Macedonio, the institutionalization of literature in Argentina has neutralized its capacity to intervene effectively into public and private life. In his artistic projects, Macedonio submits the structures of the literary institution to a relentless subversion, which Julio Prieto has described as a "desencuadernación" (173) or unbinding of the literary world, with the overarching aspiration of altering urban life from the standpoint of art.

The second program relates to Macedonio's decades-long investigations into metaphysics, which date to the final years of the 19th century and were the subject of his first published monograph, *No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* (1928). Macedonio's metaphysical investigations are in many ways a byproduct of his extremely bleak vision of the effects of sociopolitical modernization on the modern individual. Against the backdrop of a

social world that has been increasingly dominated by the modern state and its procedures for codifying the most minute aspects of social existence, Macedonio conceives metaphysical thinking as a means to reconnect with a realm of existence that has been eclipsed by modernization. In *No todo es vigilia*, building on the ideas of William James and Arthur Schopenhauer, among others, Macedonio conceives of being as a singular sensibility, a sort of universal soul that precedes distinctions between subject and object, waking life and dream, and life and death.[18] In this sense, Macedonio draws a loose analogy between the state's processes of modernization and the metaphysical determination of life in terms of dualities such as subject/object and *sueño*/*vigilia*. Then, beginning in the later years of the 1920s, he comes to view the novel as a possible means for granting the reader momentary access to this vision of being as an immanent field of phenomena.[19] In this state, produced through the act of reading, the individual's sense of self would break down, and the reader would comprehend existence as an "Almismo ayoico" (*No todo es vigilia* 243).[20] Macedonio believes that the novel is uniquely qualified to produce this experience, due to the ontological status that he assigns to the novelistic

[18] Among many introductions to Macedonio's metaphysical program, and the place that his literary project occupies within his philosophical pursuits, see: Daniel Attala, "Caída en la estética o la mínima distracción" and "Naturaleza y anti-Naturaleza o Macedonio contra Macedonio"; Waltraud Flammersfeld, "Pensamiento y pensar de Macedonio Fernández"; and Horacio González, *El filósofo cesante*.

[19] A note on capitalization: throughout his writings, Macedonio exhibits a marked tendency to capitalize nouns, generally doing so when he wishes to underline the philosophical or conceptual significance of words such as being (*Ser*), novel (*Novela*), or art (*Arte*). In general, I will maintain the lower case in my writing, in line with standard English usage. Hence, what for Macedonio would be "Being" will be written here as "being," and when I discuss his novel, I will not refer to it as a "Novel." I will, however, maintain Macedonio's capitalization in all direct quotations.

[20] Macedonio defines being as an "almismo ayoico" in the following passage from *No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*: "El Ser el mundo, todo cuanto es, es el fenómeno, el estado interno-externo, el estado meramente, es decir lo sentido, y únicamente lo sentido actualmente … [L]lamo al Ser un almismo ayoico, porque es siempre pleno en sus estados y sin demandar correlación con supuestas externalidades ni substancias, tal como es el Ensueño, todo del alma, pleno, absorbente e incomprometido con la alegada Causalidad. Ayoico, o sin yo, porque es una, única la Sensibilidad, y nada puede ocurrir, sentirse, que no sea el sentir mío, el místico sentir de nadie … El Ser es místico, es decir, pleno en cada uno de sus estados; esta plenitud significa: no radicación en un yo y no dependencia o correlación con lo llamado externo y lo llamado substancia" (*No todo es vigilia* 243). His metaphysical vision of reality has important antecedents in Arthur Schopenhauer's notion of Will as the inner, material reality of the subject's representations of the world, and William James's notion of pure experience. For an overview of Macedonio's metaphysics, see Diego Vecchio, *Egocidios*, pp. 15-38.

character in his theory of the novel, and because of the unique qualities of prose writing. He insists, however, that only a very specific type of novel is fit for this task. His *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, as well as the writings on aesthetics spread across his *Obras completas*, aim to both theorize this novel and bring it into existence.[21]

The first section of this chapter sketches Macedonio's sociological vision of modern life and situates these two programs in the context of prominent histories of modernism and the avant-garde. Sections two and three elaborate dual readings of the *Museo,* the novel that Macedonio worked on over the final three decades of his life and which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1952.[22] The first reading situates the *Museo* in the context of Macedonio's broad-based project of institutional critique. It relates a central episode of the novel, the "conquista de Buenos Aires para la Belleza" (*Museo* 194), in which the novel's characters revolutionize urban life through artistic means, to a series of projects that share this aspiration to renew life through art: Macedonio's ludic campaign for president in 1920 and 1921, his plan for a "Novela Salida a la Calle, con todos sus personajes, en ejecución de sí misma" (*Museo* 7), his humor writings, and his famous dinner-party toasts delivered at the meetings of Alberto Hidalgo's *Revista Oral.* It concludes by discussing the ways in which Macedonio reflects on these projects in the pages of his novel, ultimately conceiving them as partial failures that do not live up to their lofty aspiration of renewing urban life.

The second reading explains how, in the context of this endeavor to break down institutional barriers and change public life in Buenos Aires, Macedonio begins to conceive of

[21] Volume eight of Macedonio's *Obras completas* includes *No todo es vigilia* as well as a series of texts dating as far back as an 1896 text titled "Psicología atomista," published in the *folletín* or literary supplement of the newspaper *El Tiempo*.

[22] *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* was published for the first time by Centro Editor at the height of the Latin American literary "Boom" in 1967. It was later published as part of Macedonio's *Obras completas* (1975), by Biblioteca Ayacucho (1982), and by Ediciones Cátedra (1995). This chapter uses the 1993 critical edition edited by Ana Camblong and Macedonio's son, Adolfo de Obieta.

the novel as a means for producing a different kind of change, this time in the private, psychic life of its reader: a traumatic breakdown of her sense of self that will grant her a momentary state of consciousness of the world as a soul-without-a-self. To produce this state, the world of the novel and its characters must be rigorously autonomized from the world of its readers, as well as from all extra-novelistic influences. For Macedonio, there are three core elements of this process of autonomization. First, the novel must be secluded from the contaminating influence of all other artistic mediums. It must be an "[a]rte de un solo órgano," as Macedonio puts it: "artes simultáneas combinadas—danza y música, literatura y seudomúsica de sonoridad, rima y medida que no son música tampoco—son monstruos" ("Para una teoría del arte" 242). Second, the novelistic character, the core narratological element of the novel as defined by Macedonio, must be secluded from all realist aspirations to reproduce life in the pages of the book. The character must stand in impossible relation to any possible existing person. Third, artistic prose must seclude itself from all rhetorical embellishments: musicality, meter, and tone, among others. It must free itself of "toda impureza de sensorialidad" ("Para una teoría del arte" 245) and seek to establish a connection with the reader on the level of the reader's mental processes. The success or failure of the Macedonian novel rests on these seclusions, and he insists that only when these conditions are met can the novel guide the reader to a vision of existence beyond selfhood.

In his 2011 monograph, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, Rancière contrasts two histories of artistic modernity. The first history, which in *Aisthesis* he primarily associates with the writings of Clement Greenberg, identifies artistic modernity with "the conquest of autonomy by each art, which is expressed in exemplary works that break with the course of history, separating themselves both from the art of the past and the 'aesthetic' forms of

prosaic life" (xii). Rancière explains that fifteen years of research on modernity have led him to the exact opposite conclusion. In his view,

> the movement …which supported the dream of artistic novelty and fusion between art and life subsumed under the idea of modernity, tends to erase the specificities of the arts and to blur the boundaries that separate them from each other and from ordinary experience. (xii)

The double program that Macedonio assigns to modern art troubles this distinction, which Rancière poses as an either/or choice made by the interpreter of artistic modernity. Macedonio seems to want it both ways: the novel must take to the street and conquer the modern city, but it *also* must seclude itself away and shed all traces of extra-artistic impurity. It is thus possible to speak of a drive toward the conquest of autonomy in the Macedonian novel, although it is a drive that coexists with a relentless critique of what is conceived by Macedonio as the spurious institutional autonomy enjoyed by art in modern society.

This chapter proposes that Macedonio comprehends both histories of artistic modernity sketched by Rancière, but that he conceives the relationship between them not as a choice (modern art's program is not *this* or *that*), but rather as a paradox. Macedonio's artistic project, and his vision of artistic modernity, are constituted by *both* the blurring of boundaries separating art from life, as well as the progressive seclusion of artistic mediums, such as the Macedonian novel, away from life. The conclusion draws on Ana Camblong's landmark study of the rhetorical and political consequences of Macedonio's use of paradoxical discourses. Camblong identifies the paradox as the central mechanism operating at the heart of what she calls Macedonio's "discursive universe." By articulating her study of Macedonio's paradoxes into his dual vision of artistic modernity, this chapter aims to show how Macedonio's project can be read

as a critique of tendencies to construe the history of modern art as *either* the relentless pursuit of autonomy *or* the dream of re-connecting art and life. For Macedonio, the one history cannot exist without the other.

"Maximalist" Modernization, Artistic autonomy, and its consequences

Of the many possible starting points for approaching the *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*, this chapter begins with an overview of Macedonio's understanding of life in western societies during the early decades of the 20th century. Macedonio's novel seeks to momentarily free the reader from a historically-conditioned way of life. An overview of how Macedonio conceives the dynamics of modern life will contextualize his arrival to the Buenos Aires literary world and flesh out the specific possibilities he sees in literature as a potentially emancipatory endeavor. This overview of Macedonio's social and political theories seeks to answer the following questions: why, during the early years of the 1920s, did he increasingly conceive of the novel, and "art" more broadly, as necessary vehicles for changing life? What were the defining characteristics of the social existence that he hoped to change?

In his political writings, Macedonio identifies a basic condition has come to characterize modern life, which he defines as a "universal malestar, [que viene] creciendo desde más de un siglo…" (*Obras III*, 123). He explains that this overarching discomfort results from a cluster of economic, social, and psychological phenomena that have reverberated off each other for more than a century, suffering minor alterations over the course of time but remaining substantively similar. In the last instance, he believes that the cause of this *malestar* is a political one. Simply put, "[l]a causa política es la inflación estatal" (*Obras III*, 123). "Inflation of the state" refers to the progressive reduction of all aspects of human existence to a legislative affair, a tendency that

Macedonio also describes as "maximalism." As Macedonio sees it, the state, by way of its legal authority and its monopoly of force, has encroached further and further into society, passing and enforcing "leyes de socialización obligatoria" (*Obras III*, 123) that dictate how much in taxes a person must pay, when they must retire, how much they are to receive in social security payments in their old age, how many hours they must work, what the minimum wage must be, whether or not people should have access to alcoholic beverages, when they must vote, what size windows their house must have, what uniform their children must wear to school, how often they must bathe and what soap they should use, and so on.[23] Macedonio views the history of all western nation-states in terms of the state's voracious and seemingly limitless drive toward the absolute codification of social intercourse.

The inflation of the state has led to a symmetrical "usurpación del Individuo" (*Obras III*, 124) as the state arrogates to itself the task of organizing and managing the most minute aspects of the individual's life. As Todd Garth explains, the work done on the individual by Macedonio's maximalist state can largely be conceived in terms of state-directed formation of modern subjects or "selves," in which the individual is progressively papered over by a web of laws and political edicts: "[M]acedonio regards the self as an *institutionally* constituted falsehood pervading all aspects of the polis" (27; emphasis in original). Garth notes that Macedonio's endeavor to liberate the individual from the tyranny of the "self" shares important affinities with Michel Foucault's later studies of power in discursive relations, suggesting that when Macedonio writes of the "state," he is referring more generally to "discourses of power in specific practices and

[23] Each of these examples are cited by Macedonio in his political writings. Regarding this tendential legislation of social existence, he writes: "[c]ada ley, cada orden nuevo de actividad que asume el Estado, es un nuevo empobrecimiento del individuo y cada fracción de libertad o iniciativa arrebatada al individuo, es todo un nuevo capítulo de empobrecimiento … Como desde hace un siglo se inició inesperadamente un proceso de inflación de las facultades del Estado, mejor dicho de anemia, decapitación del individuo, la humanidad debe hallarse más pobre, aun antes de la gran guerra y del conflicto agudo social, que en 1820. Y hoy más pobre que quizás en ningún tiempo de su existencia" (*Obras III*, 132).

institutions: literary, social, and political, medical, and corporal" (29). Garth's assimilation of Macedonio's maximalist state to Foucault's study of power indicates the expansive scope of his vision of the maximalist state: the word "state," for Macedonio, functions as both an umbrella term and an overarching political cause lurking behind a complex web of historical processes that together constitute a sort of collective sickness, which he describes as "[el] gran mal del siglo XIX y XX" (*Obras III*: 126).[24] Throughout his writings on modern life, Macedonio unequivocally identifies this dynamic as the overarching and ineludible condition of social existence, which any possible emancipatory program must address: "es el horizonte inmediato, la batalla de mañana" (*Obras III*: 134).

Modern artists, philosophers, and social theorists have addressed these sorts of dynamics under diverse headings, and formulated responses from a range of political standpoints ranging from the anarchist left to the contemporary neoliberal right. In the European context, classical studies of what Macedonio calls "maximalism" include Max Weber's studies of rationalization and Franz Kafka's nightmares of maximalist modern bureaucracies, as well as Henri Lefebvre's post-World-War-II analyses of the colonization of everyday life, Hannah Arendt's studies of the progressive reduction of the human condition to a merely economic logic, and the situationist *happenings* of the 1960s. In Argentina, the recurrent celebration of the nomadic lifestyle of the gaucho seen in canonical texts such as José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* and Ricardo Güiraldes's

[24] Macedonio's reflections on maximalism are mostly contained in the 84 pages of unpublished political writings compiled for the third volume of his posthumous *Obras completas* and included under the heading "Para una teoría del Estado." Rather than treating them as an authoritative statement, they might be read as a theoretical fiction in which Macedonio formulates a vision of a modern state on the path to totalitarianism. In this light, see also his fictional texts "El zapallo que se hizo cosmos," in which a pumpkin growing in a pumpkin patch in northeast Argentina grows to encompass the totality of the cosmos, and "Cirurgía psíquica de extirpación," in which a blacksmith named Cósimo Schmitz undergoes a series of operations to relieve himself from a series of psychic duties and ends up reduced to a state of pure automatism. The pumpkin can be taken to figuratively represent the state as it is conceived in Macedonio's political writings; Cósimo Schmitz, the modern individual who has had the totality of her consciousness colonized by the "self" imposed on the individual by the inflation of the state.

Don Segundo Sombra exhibit similar tendencies (although both authors conclude by incorporating the gaucho into the Argentine state), as does Jorge Luis Borges's highly "Macedonian" identification, in the essay "Nuestro pobre individualismo," of the "gradual intromisión del Estado en los actos del individuo" (59), as "[e]l más urgente de los problemas de nuestra época" (59).[25] In recent years, critiques of the maximalist inflation of the state have continued to form the object of diverse analyses of the workings of biopolitical power, in which the modern state identifies the population of individuals living within its territory as the target of purportedly benevolent policies that aspire to optimize all aspects of the individual's life. These approaches are united by their effort to comprehend the far-reaching implications of modernization: they are structured by a common narrative in which the processes set in motion by Enlightenment culture and the emergence of the modern nation-states follow an expansionist logic that aspires to the absolute codification of social existence. When Macedonio describes a dystopian maximalist future in which "[s]ólo quedaría una coercio-vivencia indigna de vivir" (*Obras III*, 143), he situates his vision of society within this narrative of social modernity as the progressive usurpation of liberty.

On the level of political theory, Macedonio prefers a libertarian vision of a minimal state whose functions would largely be reduced to law and order. Both his metaphysical and artistic projects also directly address this withering away of the individual at the hands of a maximalist State. When he turns to the novel in the 1920s, and also when he formulates collective projects such as the campaign for president and the idea of the "Novela Salida a la Calle," he aims to

[25] For a canonical study of the representations and uses of the gaucho in Argentine culture, see Josefina Ludmer, *El género gauchesco: Un tratado sobre la patria* (1988). Borges's statement contains a parenthetical reference to the works of another of Macedonio's preferred 19th-century authors, Herbert Spencer; to the extent that Borges's statement hews very close to Macedonio's own words concerning the modern inflation of the state, this reference to Spencer can perhaps be read as an indirect citation or homage to Macedonio.

intervene in this state of affairs from the standpoint of art. Art becomes a means for undoing the "self" created by the hypertrophy of the modern state, and it aspires to help the spectator re-connect to a long-suppressed, originary mode of being beyond the social straitjacket of the self.

Macedonio's political writings describe the inflation of the state as a historical process dating back to the early decades of the 19th century, and while his diverse strategies of institutional critique indicate that he unquestionably believes that the fields of art and literature have been affected by the maximalist procedures of the state (i.e., the "laws of obligatory socialization" that dictate when people should retire and what type of soap they should use also dictate what sort of art they should make), he does not directly address the ways that they have gotten caught up in this dynamic. It is therefore helpful to supplement his vision of modernity with a brief sketch of what, by the final decades of the 20th century, came to constitute the dominant way of conceiving the fate of art in social modernity.

Jürgen Habermas's essay "Modernity versus Postmodernity" shows how this vision of cultural modernity takes shape in the work of Max Weber. Weber, working within the Kantian philosophical tradition, demonstrates how, over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, modernizing societies progressively shed their traditional reliance on religion and metaphysics when seeking answers to the overarching questions facing humankind. They instead delegated these problems to the emergent spheres of science, morality, and art, relating to Immanuel Kant's three critiques of pure reason, morality, and judgment. Each sphere is guided by its own logic, respectively, "the structures of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and of aesthetic-expressive rationality" (8). Each is conceived as particularly attuned to handling specific types of problems: science addresses questions concerning the true workings of life and the universe; jurisprudence addresses questions of right and wrong; and art investigates the concepts of beauty

and taste, as well as human beings' aesthetic-expressive capacities. In a process that Macedonio would surely view as part of the inflationary impulse of the modern state, an institutional framework accrues around the work done in each sphere: laboratories in the sphere of science, law schools in the sphere of jurisprudence, and, in the sphere of art, museums, art galleries, specialized publications, large publishing houses, and public art exhibitions, among many other elements.[26] Those who work in each sphere are increasingly viewed as professionals who possess a specific, expert form of knowledge concerning the problems that pertain to their sphere of activity. For Weber (and Habermas), this tripartite division of cultural labor comes to characterize the increasingly secularized, rationalized societies of the 19th-century western world.

This project of Enlightenment enters into crisis in the 20th century, a crisis that, for Habermas and many others, is inseparable from the history of modernist and avant-garde art.

[26] It bears noting that Julio Ramos's investigation of the relative failure of the endeavor to institutionalize artistic autonomy in 19th-and-early-20th-century Latin America is based largely on the relative failure of the construction of this sort of institutional framework in the region. Writers throughout the region aim to conquer artistic autonomy in manner similar to their European forebears, but, while "la *voluntad* de autonomía es ineluctible" (137, emphasis in original), their pursuits are frustrated by "el carácter *desigual* de la modernización [en América Latina], de la autonomización y de la profesionalización misma" (153, emphasis in original). Literature, for Ramos, is not successfully institutionalized as an autonomous sphere, and the writings of *modernista* authors bear the marks of this protracted and ultimately ill-fated struggle for autonomy. *Pace* Ramos, however, the further development of the literary field in Buenos Aires over the course of the first three decades of the 20th century might be taken as an indication of an increasingly successful institutionalization of autonomy in the Buenos Aires literary field. Over the course of the first three decades of the 20th century, Argentina witnessed a spectacular expansion of the institutional framework supporting literature, as part of a more general panorama of social modernization. The establishment of a course in Argentine literature at the University of Buenos Aires, initially taught by Ricardo Rojas; the creation of lucrative state-sponsored prizes such as the Premio Nacional de Letras and the Premios Municipales in Buenos Aires, which aimed to provide material support for artistic creation; the foundation of the Asociación de Amigos del Arte in 1924 and the Sociedad Argentina de Escritores in 1928; the growth of modern presses and the steady expansion of the literary marketplace in light of the rapid growth of the Argentine middle classes in the first decades of the 20th century; and the invitation of a series of prominent figures such as F.T. Marinetti and Luigi Pirandello to Argentina in order to deliver lectures and build connections with local writers. These and other developments, many of which counted on financial and legislative support from the Argentine state, aspired to enshrine literature as an autonomous sphere of activity in Argentine society and were often greeted with open arms by writers who viewed them as a legitimation of their literary production and of their place in national life. There is every reason to believe, however, that Macedonio would have considered these phenomena as part and parcel of the expansionist logic of the modern, maximalist state, and his *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* can be read as a systematic critique of institutional autonomy in the Buenos Aires literary field of the 1920s.

Over time, a massive gulf comes to separate the cultural life of the experts from the cultural life of the larger public. As artistic production increasingly becomes subject to what Macedonio would call the legislational drive of the "maximalist" state, scientists, legal experts, and artists become imprisoned within their own autonomous spheres of activity, divorced from the everyday lives of the greater public. The formulators of the project of Enlightenment did not foresee this development: they had hoped that the advances produced by the specialists working in each sphere would flow naturally into everyday life and progressively improve social existence. However, as Habermas puts it, "[t]he 20th century has shattered this optimism. The differentiation of science, morality, and art has come to mean the autonomy of the segments treated by the specialist and at the same time letting them split off from the hermeneutics of everyday communication" (9). This isolation of each sphere's experts, which in the sphere of art is often represented figuratively in images of the artist secluded in an ivory tower, becomes one of the central problems addressed by artists living and working in modern societies.

During the middle decades of the 20th century, two prominent narratives arose concerning how 20th century art and literature respond to this crisis. The first narrative, exemplified here by the works of Clement Greenberg and Theodor Adorno, emphasizes how art moves forward by way of a perpetual doubling-down on its autonomy, aspiring to purify itself of diverse types of vital content in search of its innermost qualities. Already in 1925, José Ortega y Gasset had described the new art of the early 20th century in terms a generational endeavor to "dehumanize" art by privileging formal experimentation and thereby purifying the art work of almost all aspects of "human" content.[27] For Greenberg, modern art as a whole is characterized by the way that

[27] Ortega famously employs a visual metaphor to illustrate how this new "dehumanized" art diverges radically from the "humanized" art of the 19th century: when a viewing subject looks out at a garden through a windowpane, there are two mutually exclusive options. One can either fix one's optical focus on the contents of the garden, or, to the contrary, "podemos desentendernos del jardín y, retrayendo el rayo ocular, detenernos en el vidrio" (23). The garden

painting and each of the other traditional mediums (sculpture, poetry, music) investigate their own formal limits in a self-critical process of Kantian inspiration. Painting, for example, arrives at the flatness of the pictorial space as its primordial area of competence: because it is "the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else" (6). Through each medium's pursuit of its own specificity, modern art is able to defend its independence from a fallen social existence *and* from the mass-cultural forms that proliferate in modern societies, which are characterized by their non-autonomous relationship to modern consumer societies.

Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, which shares Greenberg's reliance on traditional distinctions between painting, music, sculpture, and poetry (as well as his extreme distrust of mass culture), elaborates perhaps the most powerful vision of autonomy in modern art, insisting from the book's first page that "art's autonomy is irrevocable" (1). By submitting their materials to a process of artistic forming, artists detach these materials from the realm of the empirical life-world of modern, bourgeois society. In virtue of this passage through form, works become "windowless monads" (5), irrevocably sealed off from the reality of which they nonetheless form a part: "[t]he communication of artworks with what is external to them, with the world from which they blissfully or unhappily seal themselves off, occurs through noncommunication: precisely thereby they prove themselves refracted" (5). Over the course of the past two centuries, different movements in art have sought to either conceal the refractory nature of their relationship with the outside world (the realist novel can be thought of as prototypical of this

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beyond represents the "realidad humana" (25) of the work of art; the pane of glass, on the other hand, represents the set of "elementos puramente estéticos" (22) employed by the artist whose work represents that "human" reality. For Ortega, a properly aesthetic experience can only come about through the contemplation of the work's aesthetic elements; any interest in the human content of the work—any sympathy for the characters and their fates—is, "en principio, incompatible con la estricta fruición estética" (22).

tendency), or exacerbate it. For Adorno, however, art is constitutively unable to escape the fate of autonomy.

Adorno views art's autonomy historically, as an achievement of a centuries-long historical process in which, guided by the Enlightenment ideals of humanity and of absolute freedom, art shed its cultic functions and liberated itself from the sacred. In theory, this liberation was cause for celebration: art would provide humanity with a sphere to pursue absolute freedom beyond the limits of the actually-existing social world. However, social modernization and the tendency toward the complete administration of social existence have led to a condition that Adorno describes as the "perennial unfreedom of the whole" (1).[28] Adorno, like Macedonio, insists that humanity has become progressively *less* free over time, and in this context, "art's inescapable affirmative essence has become insufferable" (2). The modern work of art is desperate not to produce empty consolation by affirming visions of freedom in a world characterized by its absence, yet is fatally destined to be affirmative by its very autonomous nature. It thus seeks to repeatedly negate the ideological bases of existing bourgeois aesthetics, which Adorno views as consolational in nature. Principles such as ugliness and "dissonance, the seal of everything modern" (15) serve to seclude the art work away not only from empirical reality, but also from the bourgeois culture that exists, across Adorno's writings, as modern art's perpetual antagonist.

Adorno views the history of artistic modernity as a progressive intensification of this negativity. Kafka's power is that of a "negative feel" for social reality (19), and Picasso's cubist paintings critique the bourgeois belief that art is a product of free human expression by exacerbating the mechanical, constructed nature of the art work. His paintings thus become, "by

[28] Adorno speaks of the "total administration" (17) of society in a very similar fashion to Macedonio's discussion of the "maximalist" inflation of the modern state.

virtue of asceticism against expression, far more expressive than those works that were inspired by cubism but feared to lose expression and became supplicant" (44). For Adorno, bourgeois society revels in art's supposed naïveté, conceiving culture as a realm of natural human expression free from society's governing economic logic. Modern artists rebel against this conception of art by embracing rationalist, inhuman principles of artistic creation such as construction, technique, and reflection, always in pursuit of ever-more-sophisticated ways of ensuring that every element of the autonomous art work is filtered through the principle of form.

While Adorno's ideal reader/spectator attempts to comprehend the modern work as fully as possible, Adorno insists that this comprehension does not exhaust the meaning of the work. One can come to a relatively complete knowledge of the formal properties of a Kafka story, as well as a thorough understanding of its narrative and discursive contents. Adorno insists, however, that this is not what the work ultimately wants to communicate. The truth of art—what it truly seeks to transmit to the viewer—lies just beyond this totalizing, systematic knowledge. It is an experience or vision of a world other than this one, made possible by the detachment, slight as it may be, that separates the art work and everything in it from the realm of the empirical, a term which in Adorno's writings (and in this chapter) is used to reference the everyday world of lived experience. Among other definitions, Adorno describes truth content as "mediate nature" (78). The artist, through the elaboration of her materials, produces a work of art that occupies the exact opposite pole from the raw, unformed, material world of immediate nature. It is precisely nature, however, or that which "withdraws from universal conceptuality" (70)—a realm un-grasped and un-graspable by conceptual thought—that peeks through in this context of absolute artistic mediation.[29] As will be emphasized below, this linkage of a certain culmination of the

[29] It is important to note the dialectical nature of Adorno's vision of artistic autonomy: the work of art is *both* autonomous *and* absolutely conditioned by its nature as a social fact. Everything that goes into the creation of a

aesthetic experience with a visionary state produced in the spectator shares important affinities with Macedonio's theory of the novel.

Peter Bürger, whose *Theory of the Avant-Garde* was published just a few years after Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, diverges sharply from Adorno's treatment of autonomy: Bürger sees the historical avant-garde movements of the early 20th century, such as Dada and Surrealism, as heroic but ultimately ill-fated projects to *destroy* the autonomy of art.[30] In Bürger's view, the avant-garde is historically unique (that is, its historical mission is qualitatively different from previous movements in modern art, from Romanticism to turn-of-the-century aestheticism) because it comprehends the way that the institution of art, which in modernity comes to be structured around the principle of autonomy, conditions the production and reception of individual works. Over the course of the hundred years leading up to the avant-garde moment of the early 20th century, the formation of a web of institutional structures to support artistic creation had coalesced into a rigid normative framework governing all aspects of the production and consumption of art. The avant-garde movements that take the institution as the object of their critical project reveal an already-existing level of institutional mediation situated between the spectator and the work of art that had gone largely unperceived in 20th-century art theory.

For Bürger, the avant-gardes are able to recognize the significance of the institution because a previous tendency in art, which he refers to as "aestheticism," made art's institutional status visible by converting artistic autonomy into its central theme. When, in a work such as

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work of art is social: the cultural traditions, the techniques used by the artist, the ideas that shape their treatment of reality, and so on. Modern art as a whole "absorbs what industrialization has developed under the given relations of production" (34). However, the inherent separateness of the work of art from the empirical realm of life institutes a relationship of non-communication between the world of the work and the social world of its creator.

[30] Bürger critiques the Adornian model for remaining internal to 20th-century debates about modernism. He refers to the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century as the *historical* avant-gardes in order to mark the temporal difference separating his study from the work of predecessors such as Adorno and Georg Lukács. For Bürger, the passage of time, and especially the revolutionary social unrest of the 1960s, has revealed a very different history of modern art.

Rubén Darío's poem "Sonatina," a pale, blue-eyed princess sits sadly on her Golden throne and looks out on a verdant private garden, her lonely isolation from the outside world reproduces art's autonomy from everyday life. As Bürger explains in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the avant-gardes do not object to aestheticism's critique of bourgeois society. They partake in aestheticism's rejection of instrumental reason, and they too elaborate alternate visions of modernity that reject the reduction of life to questions of economic utility. They diverge from aestheticism, however, in their attempt to undo the separation of art from life by developing what Bürger calls "a new life praxis from a basis in art" (49). The avant-gardes attempt to sublate art into life, thereby "do[ing] away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life" (53). Bürger famously sees this endeavor as failing in the face of what he calls the "false sublation" (54) of art and life enacted by the culture industry. He insists that the avant-gardes are historically significant, however, in that they revealed an unperceived level of mediation separating art and life, in the figure of the institution and its diverse avatars.

Bürger complements his vision of the avant-garde's attempted sublation of life with a theory of the "avant-gardiste work" (56) in which this shattering of the institutional framework of art is enacted at the level of the individual work.[31] He defines the avant-gardiste work as nonorganic and allegorical, in contrast to the traditional work, which is both organic and symbolist. The traditional work is organic because the artist treats her materials as both living and inherently meaningful; it is symbolist because, along the lines of the Romantic understanding of the symbol, it aspires to enact the immediate unity of the particular and the

[31] Bürger acknowledges the manner in which interventions such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* problematize the very concept of the work of art. He largely sidesteps Duchamp's radically nominalist conception of the work of art by foregrounding cubism and surrealism in his discussion of the avant-gardiste work of art. For a thorough examination of how Duchamp's artistic project relates to a broader typology of modernisms, see Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, pp. 71-97.

universal in what Bürger describes as "a living picture of the totality" (70). The avant-gardiste work, on the other hand, is the product of the melancholy labor of the allegorist. Avant-garde artists exist within a fallen, fragmented reality in which nothing, none of their possible materials, bears inherent meaning. They pry loose fragments of that reality and, in a procedure that Bürger relates to cinematic montage, they assemble them in a work of art. They do not negate the unity of the work as such, but instead construct a unity in which the universal and the particular come together in a mediate, nonorganic fashion. While the traditional work sought to ensure that the artist's materials pass through an organic process of forming (the artist molds the clay, or uses brushstrokes to distribute the paint), the avant-gardiste work is characterized by the direct "insertion of reality fragments into the painting, i.e., the insertion of material that has been left unchanged by the artist" (78). The cubist collages of Picasso and Braque that insert bits of canvas and wallpaper in the midst of paint, and the photomontages of John Heartfield, elaborated out of clippings from the print media, are emblematic of this process in which raw, unformed elements of reality are violently inserted into the no-longer-organic pictorial frame. As Bürger explains, this gives the avant-gardiste work a different ontological status: "the parts of it no longer have the relation to reality characteristic of the organic work of art. They are no longer signs pointing to reality, they *are* reality" (78).[32]

[32] To clarify, while Adorno consistently emphasizes the importance of the principle of form in *Aesthetic Theory*, he, like Bürger, rejects the idea of an "organic" work of art. Of works of art, he writes that "in terms of their own structure, they are not organisms; works of the highest rank are hostile to their organic aspect as illusory and affirmative. In all its genres, art is pervaded with intellective elements" (89). Adorno associates the idea of the "organic" work of art with traditional understandings of artistic creation as a process of intuitive (i.e., non-intellective) forming of materials; modern art, on the other hand, is characterized by the dominance of an intellective or constructive principle of artistic forming. Adorno nonetheless insists that the work of art should consist entirely of materials formed by the artist. This is clearest in his rejection of cinematic montage and the place it occupies in Walter Benjamin's theory of art in the age of technical reproduction: "[i]t is precisely montage that is to be criticized for possessing the remains of a complaisant irrationalism, for adaptation to a material that is delivered ready-made from outside the work" (56).

This practice of allegorical montage is echoed in Macedonio's description, in an early prologue for the *Museo*, of the "Novela Salida a la Calle." In this proposed spectacle, which, as commentators have often pointed out, foreshadows the performance-art happenings of the 1960s, "[e]l público miraría nuestros 'jirones de arte,' escenas de novela ejecutándose en las calles, entreverándose a 'jirones de vida'" (14).[33] This dynamic, where fragments of art intermix with fragments of life, is later echoed in the novel's ninth chapter, "La Conquista de Buenos Aires." That chapter, which allegorizes the artistic conflict between social realist and avant-garde/experimentalist movements in 1920s Buenos Aires, elaborates a novelistic representation of art taking to the streets as the novel's characters set out to resolve the conflict and conquer the city in the name of beauty by subtly inserting "artistic" alterations into the fabric of urban life. As Camblong explains, this "planificación de una salida teatral de la novela" should be understood as an attempt to overcome the institutionalized separation of art and life and "inventar alternativas que incorporaran el arte a la vida" (Estudio preliminar, xxxviii). These visions of art "sublating" life proliferate across Macedonio's textual corpus, suggesting that he might be read profitably as an "avant-gardiste" in the sense proposed by Bürger.

However, Macedonio's theory of the work of art (and, in particular, his theory of the novel) ultimately diverges sharply from Bürger's model for the avant-gardiste work. He insists on medium-specificity in every bit as strict of a fashion as Greenberg, and he exhibits a much

[33] The opposite scenario, in which the street, taken as the scene of public, everyday life of the multitude, is intermixed into the work of art, was recognized by José Carlos Mariátegui in a 1924 essay titled "La torre de marfil" to constitute one of the major shifts separating the new literature of his time from earlier "decadent" movements that sought to seclude art away from the social intercourse of bourgeois society. Using the work of Luigi Pirandello as an example, he explains how the flow of the multitudinous life of the street enters into the work, comparing the street's presence in the modern work to the presence of the chorus in Greek tragedy: "El drama humano tiene hoy, como en las tragedias griegas, un coro multitudinario. En una obra de Pirandello, uno de los personajes es la calle. La calle con sus rumores y con sus gritos está presente en los tres actos del drama pirandelliano. La calle, ese personaje anónimo y tentacular que la torre de marfil y sus macilentos hierofantes ignoran y desdeñan. La calle, o sea, el vulgo; o sea, la muchedumbre. La calle, cauce proceloso de la vida, del dolor, del placer, del bien y del mal" (141).

more Adornian preoccupation with preserving the distinction of the work from the life-world. In another prologue of the *Museo* he writes, "[y]o quiero que el lector sepa siempre que está leyendo una novela y no viendo un vivir, no presenciando vida" (37). That the reader should *ever*, even for an instant, believe that the novel is populated by living, breathing characters is cause for perpetual paranoia on the part of the novelist. Macedonio most commonly refers to this phenomenon in terms of *alucinación*. He insists that "[e]n el momento en que el lector caiga en la Alucinación, ignominia del Arte, yo he perdido, no ganado lector. Lo que yo quiero es muy otra cosa" (37). Here he emphasizes that the line between life and art must not be transgressed: the moment in which "life" rears its head in the pages of the novel and the reader, forgetting that she is reading a work of artifice, begins to experience the novel as a fragment of real life, is an abomination to the very concept of art.

Macedonio describes the relation between art and life as something of a one-way street: art can flow into life and conquer the city, but on the strict condition that life not cross over into the pages of the novel. The following two sections of this chapter seek to account for these divergent visions of a novel taking the street and a novel secluded from life. It begins with an "avant-garde" reading illustrating how one of the central plot lines developed in the *Museo* relates to Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. It also reflects on why this line of thinking has come to constitute the hegemonic understanding of Macedonio's novel in recent critical literature. It then articulates an "Adornian" reading of the *Museo* from the standpoint of Macedonio's theory of the work of art. Robert Kaufman has described Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as an endeavor to "rewrite the history of aesthetic theory … [by] making it spiral from Hegel to Kant" (710); the following pages attempt a similar spiraling-backward of Macedonio's

novel, from the model of avant-garde institutional critique elaborated by Bürger to Adorno's theory of the modern work of art.

THE CONQUEST OF BUENOS AIRES: THE "AVANT-GARDE" PLOT OF MACEDONIO'S *MUSEO*

The *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* is famous for its unique form, in which prologues outnumber chapters by an almost three-to-one ratio. There are more than fifty prologues in the 1993 edition, followed by eighteen chapters and a short sequence of epilogues. While in general these short texts fulfill the classical function of the genre by providing the reader with a general set of instructions on how to read the novel, their massive proliferation is largely due to the fact that, for the author, the question of how one is to read a novel is both extremely complicated and historically determined.

Across his prologues (and the chapters that follow), Macedonio lays bare the mechanisms that structure the creation and circulation of literature in 1920s Buenos Aires, showing how the reader's reception of the literary work has been conditioned by publishing norms, the market, different categories of implicit readers, and a wide spectrum of presuppositions concerning artistic creation. In the *Museo*'s many prologues, the novel enacts a systematic interrogation of categories such as "author," "reader," and "novel," and radically questions the notions of "genius" and "originality" that had underpinned literary production since the romantic era of the early 19th century. The prologues address nearly every aspect of the literary world of Macedonio's time, from the tendency of authors to append pompous lists of published and future works to the inner covers of their novels, to the proliferation of readers who (wrongly, in Macedonio's mind) seek in the pages of novels the thrill of a suspenseful plot, or the illusory reproduction of life that Macedonio associates with literary realism. As Julio Prieto explains,

Macedonio's vision of the literary world takes the institution of literature as its object: it takes aim at the "lugar institucionalmente predeterminado de la lectura," with the objective of making that place "singularmente inhóspito—si no inhabitable" (*Desencuadernados* 200). This intense focus on how the reader's reception of a novel is conditioned by a kaleidoscopic array of institutional factors underscores how the prologues mark one of the most compelling points of connection between Macedonio's novel and Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Moreover, as the pages that follow will show, this program of institutional critique extends outward from the *Museo*'s prologues, and indeed can be taken to characterize his lifelong artistic project.

The inversion of the typical relation between prologue (typically brief) and novel (typically much longer) substantially alters the status of the plot. If the prologues can be described in terms of an overarching plot, it is that of the promise of a novel whose arrival is perpetually delayed: the writer lingers at the threshold, filling pages (and time) and deferring the moment of transition to the *Museo*'s numbered chapters. When the chapters finally do arrive, however, they are structured around a minimal plot that culminates in the allegorical ninth chapter, "La Conquista de Buenos Aires," in which the novel's characters conspire to conquer the city "para la Belleza y el Misterio" (200). The author reveals the plot in one of the prologues as a way of cancelling in advance the sort of suspenseful, plot-driven novel preferred by the much-abhorred "lector de desenlaces" (243):

> Un señor de cierta edad, el Presidente, en un paraje de nuestro país, va reuniendo a todas las personas que en sus excursiones fuera de su casa se le hacen simpáticas, y quieren vivir con él.
>
> Esta tertulia de la amistad se prolonga un tiempo feliz, pero el huésped no lo es: incita a sus amigos a entrar en una Acción.

La Acción se cumple con éxito pero él continúa infeliz.

Concluída la acción se separan, y con otros detalles y sucesos no se sabe más de nadie. (69)

This, in less than one hundred words, constitutes the entirety of the visible plot of the *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*. An older character, "el Presidente," gathers together a small group of interesting people and invites them to cohabitate his home; they pass a time in friendly conversation, but a certain dissatisfaction leads him to propose an action, the conquest of the city. The action is a success, but it does not make him happy, and the characters part ways in the end.

The plot centering on the conquest of Buenos Aires allegorically recounts key moments of 1920s cultural life in Buenos Aires. The initial situation into which the President and his followers intervene is characterized by a state of discord in Buenos Aires, where two opposing groups named the "Eternecientes" and the "Hilarantes" have divided the population. These groups fairly clearly allude to the two competing groups that protagonized the Argentine avant-garde experience of the 1920s: the "Grupo de Boedo," known for producing heart-rending realist narratives, and the "Grupo de Florida," known for its iconoclastic humor. The conquest carried out by Macedonio's President and his followers is positioned as an attempt to resolve this conflict and bring peace to cultural life. Importantly, the President's means of accomplishing this demonstrate an important affinity with the prologues: the conquest, like the prologues, hinges on what is perhaps best understood as an expansive program of institutional critique, with the distinction that its object is not the literary institution, but rather the institutions that govern everyday life in the city. The conquest takes place through the systematic manipulation of the fabric of everyday life: the characters arrive in the city and stealthily enact a vast web of

micrological alterations in the fabric of urban life, employing what the narrator describes as "diversos recursos sutiles y amenos de desesperación o encantamiento de la población de Buenos Aires" (200). The "recursos de desesperación" are meant to upset the rhythms of daily life, laying bare their conventional character and producing a universal feeling of despair among the populace. Three examples are the subsidized circulation of deaf people and overweight people who "estorban en todas partes" (201), the replacement of mirrors with ones that are too narrow to reflect a person's entire face when stared at from the customary distance, and the uneven watering of the trees lining the city's plazas and sidewalks, designed to "desespera[r] a quienes miran regar" (201). These tactics produce a progressive accumulation of minor yet frustrating inconveniences in city life, provoking the people of Buenos Aires to "salir a la plaza pidiendo un Presidente Quita-dolor de tantas exasperaciones" (202).

The "recursos de encantamiento," for their part, are meant to remedy this despair and re-enchant life in the city by suppressing the weight of the historical past from the city's daily life and replace it with an aestheticized state of "Presente fluido" (203). They remove the statues "que enlutan las plazas" (203); they change the names of the city's plazas and streets to "los nombres de las máximas vivencias humanas" (203), including "Alegría, Sombra, Ojos, Paciencia, Amor, Misterio, Maternidad, Alma" (203); and, finally, they introduce a new calendar system "[que] tiene 365 días de un solo nombre: 'Hoy,' y la avenida principal se llama también 'Hoy'" (203).[34]

[34] This effort to reenchant the city also resonates with one of the early projects of the Buenos Aires avant-garde: the project for a *revista mural* (a literary journal published in mural form, on the walls of the city) that was eventually "published" in 1921, in a single issue, under the name *Prisma*. In the manifesto titled "Proclama" and signed by Jorge Luis Borges, Guillermo Juan, Eduardo González Lanuza, and Guillermo de Torre," the contributors explain that their endeavor to "desanquilosar el arte" (27) has led them to cover the walls of the city's streets with their journal-mural, with the following objectives: "Hemos embanderado de poemas las calles, hemos iluminado con lámparas verbales vuestro camino, hemos ceñido vuestros muros con enredaderas de versos. Que ellos, izados como gritos, vivan la momentánea eternidad de todas las cosas, i sea comparable su belleza dadivosa i transitoria, a la de un jardín vislumbrado a la música desparramada por una abierta ventana y que colma todo el paisaje" (27).

Garth describes this two-pronged process as an attempt to "'novelize' the real city—that is, to convert the city into an open work of art" (79). More specifically, it can be conceived as a specular inversion of Bürger's theory of the avant-gardiste work of art: instead of inserting "reality fragments" into the space of art, it functions by way of the insertion of *art-fragments* into the space of urban life. The conquest of Buenos Aires disrupts the organicity of city life by the insertion of fragments of "art": the elements of art are no longer signs that point to reality, but rather infiltrate reality itself. At the chapter's end, this artistic "depuración de la cultura, de[l] pasado reciente [de la ciudad]" (204), proves successful. Having confirmed that, due to their systematic re-enchantment of the urban environment, "la salud civil se restableció por sí sola," (204), the President and his followers claim success in their endeavor and return home that evening to the country estate they cohabitate.

Institutional critique can be taken as the central theme of the Macedonian novel in two interlocking ways. The author's dozens of prologues enact a far-reaching study of the institutional framework that conditions the production and reception of literary works like novels. The conquest of Buenos Aires takes as its primary target the institutions of daily life in the city, from the maintenance of green spaces in the city's streets to the custom of checking one's face in mirrors to look for blemishes or bits of food between the teeth. This critique largely enacts, in the fictional space of the *Museo*, the "Novela Salida a la Calle" described in the prologues: the novel's characters leave their estate and circulate through the city's streets, intermixing small portions of art into the life of the city and activating the latent aesthetic nature of everyday activities, as well as the objects that populate the city's diverse locales. Furthermore, the priority granted to the critique of literary and social institutionality in the pages of the

Macedonian novel can be made to radiate outward toward a number of the author's other interventions into Argentine cultural life.

First, the short, humorous articles that Macedonio published in journals such as *Martín Fierro* and *Proa* in the early 1920s, and for which he gained a certain renown in literary circles, also take the institutions of life and of literature as their target. They utilize the character of the *Recienvenido* (awkwardly translatable to "the recently-arrived man or person"), a writer who has only recently arrived in the city and is unfamiliar with its customs, to humorously lay bare the conventions of both everyday social interactions and of early-20th-century literary journalism.

Second, Macedonio's famous participation in the Alberto Hidalgo-directed *Revista Oral*, a "journal" that instead of issuing printed issues consisted of a series of nocturnal meetings at the Royal Keller café, during which contributors would orally "publish" their material. At these meetings, Macedonio delivered a series of toasts to figures from both the Buenos Aires cultural field, such as Leopoldo Marechal, Norah Lange, Alejandro Sirio, as well as visiting dignitaries such as Jules Superveille, Gerardo Diego, and the futurist F.T. Marinetti. As he gives these toasts, Macedonio repeatedly uses humor to lay bare the mechanisms of the "toast" as a genre, and of literary consecration in general. In the "Brindis a Leopoldo Marechal," for example, he begins by explaining that "[e]l principio del discurso es su parte más difícil y desconfío de los que empiezan por él" (*Papeles de Recienvenido* 136), and when he introduces Gerardo Diego, he quips that "[e]s tan poco lo que tengo que decir, señores, que temo me tome mucho tiempo el encontrar en un brindis tan estrecho un lugarcito donde situarle el fin" (*Papeles de Recienvenido* 122). Both quotes deploy a conceptual humor that, as demonstrated below, is one of the most important elements of Macedonio's novelistic project. They fleetingly convince the listener of the rationality of an absurd idea, such as the possibility of starting a speech from a point that is

not the beginning, or the idea of a speech so short that there is no place for its end, with the idea that this momentary belief in the absurd will produce the positive affective state manifested in laughter, and also cause the listener to ponder the artificiality of the institution of the pre-banquet toast.

Third, and finally, Macedonio's irreverent plan to campaign for president in 1920 and 1921. In his literary biography of Macedonio, Álvaro Abós provides a detailed summary of the campaign. Macedonio had a small cohort of conspirators subtly disseminate the candidate's name throughout the city. He proposed to win over immigrant communities by having his name stamped in books printed in foreign languages throughout the city, and he sought to circulate slips of paper with humorous, enigmatic messages, such as the following ones, cited by Abós: "Macedonio … ¿volará? Cuando el aire tenga barandita," and "Macedonio, aviador del piso" (102). After the election of Marcelo T. Alvear in 1922 brought this campaign to its natural end, Macedonio began re-working this theme into his literary projects in a process that Abós describes as a "[pasaje] de la realidad a la literatura" ("Macedonio, candidato a presidente").[35] In the mid-1920s, he began a collective novel project (all written evidence of which is lost), co-written by himself, Borges, Scalabrini Ortiz, and others, whose plot, presaging the conquest of Buenos Aires in Macedonio's *Museo*, "contaba un plan para difundir entre la población un malestar general que provocara el ansia por la llegada de un Salvador: éste no sería otro que el propio Macedonio" (*La biografía imposible* 103).

All of these experiences carry over into Macedonio's novelistic project. The humoristic critique of social and literary institutionality, as well as the plot of sowing general confusion and discord then sweeping in to conquer the city, are two of the core elements of the *Museo de la*

[35] Abós's *Macedonio Fernández: La biografía imposible* elaborates a thorough investigation of these events. See especially pp. 99-106.

Novela de la Eterna. Due to the central place that it occupies in the plot of Macedonio's *Museo*, as well as its resonance with these prior endeavors, the "Conquista de Buenos Aires" has often come to occupy a central place in critical appreciations of Macedonio's novel. In a framing of the novel that figures prominently in the readings of Julio Prieto and Ricardo Piglia, the chapter stands as a microcosm of the novel as a whole, which is in turn situated in a series with Macedonio's campaign for president, the "Novela Salida a la Calle," and even Macedonio's youthful trip to Paraguay with a group of friends who together hoped to establish a utopian colony.[36] These episodes are then taken to obey a common avant-garde impulse, driven by the aspiration of renewing life through artistic means, that sits at the core of Macedonio's literary project.

This reading gains additional credence when Macedonio's project is compared with later tendencies in avant-garde artistic and political activity, from surrealist and Situationist treatments of urban space, to the happenings of the 1960s, to cultural manifestations and protest movements that sought to break down barriers between art and life, such as the *Tucumán Arde* exhibition in Argentina and the general strike of Paris, 1968. Bürger, in a recent retrospective concerning the impact of his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, has highlighted the way in which the appearance of surrealist slogans on the walls of the streets of Paris during the strike created a constellation of meaning, illuminating a previously-unperceived facet of the historical project of the avant-gardes: "May 1968 made surrealism legible in a manner that it had not been previously" ("Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde" 711). Prieto and Piglia employ a similar logic of deferred

[36] For a thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding Macedonio's trip to Paraguay, see Abós, *La biografía imposible*, pp. 39-51. While Macedonio did indeed travel to Paraguay in 1897, Abós emphasizes that Macedonio never alluded in his writings to the idea of founding a utopian colony. Much of the information about this event comes from the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, who from the early 1920s emphasized this element of his friend's life. Abós also highlights the resonances between Borges's descriptions of Macedonio's experience in Paraguay and the plot of his short story "El congreso."

action, showing how Macedonio's *Museo* stands in dialectical relation to later events in art and literature, which have in turn allowed for renewed understandings of his artistic project.[37]

For Prieto, the parallel endeavors to bring art to public life and to critique the institutional framework of literature point toward the avant-garde nature of Macedonio's project. Citing Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, he explains that Macedonio not only questions the public status of art, but also the spectrum of "mecanismos convencionales de su socialización—su consabida *mise en scène*—a través de categorías o instituciones (autor, libro, empresa editorial) afectadas de anquilosamiento" (54). He explains how, in this context, the presidential campaign's project of "ficcionalización del espacio público" (76) is both thematized and transferred to the practice of writing, serving as "una estética y como una estrategia de escritura: del proyecto de 'histerizar' la ciudad se pasa a la consigna hermenéutica de 'histerizar' al (e)lector" (76). The campaign for president serves as a road map for reading the novel in its entirety: the tactics employed in the campaign are analogous to the tactics used by the characters to revolutionize the public space of the city, as well as the tactics used by Macedonio to critique the institutional framework of literature. Prieto emphasizes that, like Bürger's avant-gardes, Macedonio aspires to enact a rupture with the institution of art with the aspiration of producing "una *Aufhebung* del arte en vida, una negación de la autonomía de la esfera estética que la 'eleve' o transforme en praxis sociopolítica" (13).

Ricardo Piglia's reflections on Macedonio share with Prieto's an emphasis on the fundamentally avant-garde nature of his literature. Piglia emphasizes the centrality of the *creative project*, in which the author or artist first proposes a new concept of art, then attempts, in a series of interventions, to elaborate the implications of that conceptual shift. In this, Piglia

[37] For an extended discussion of extensions of the psychoanalytic concept of deferred action for the study of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art, see Chapter 3 on the works of Ricardo Piglia, pp. 178-182.

explains, Macedonio can be thought of as "una especie de Marcel Duchamp de la literatura. Practica un arte puramente conceptual, interesado más en el proyecto que en la obra misma. En realidad, la obra no es otra cosa que el proyecto" ("Conversación"). The notion of the project allows Piglia to link Macedonio's *Museo* to other elements of Macedonio's life's work, and to propose that these elements can be understood to relate, in the last instance, to the radical re-thinking of the relation between literature and politics that is at the heart of Macedonio's avant-garde concept of art. For Piglia, Macedonio, who writes a novel whose central character is known simply as "the President," inaugurates a properly avant-garde tendency in Argentina due to his insistence on literature's capacity to intervene in national-political life.

In his readings of the *Museo*, Piglia repeatedly positions the plot of the "Conquista de Buenos Aires" as a fictional nexus around which the Macedonian project revolves. This is especially apparent in his *Teoría del complot*, a text originally delivered as a conference speech in 2001 and later published in book form. In that essay, Piglia describes the novel in the following terms:

> En *El Museo de la novela de la Eterna*, [Macedonio] narra la construcción de un complot cuya intención es conquistar la ciudad de Buenos Aires para modificar su sistema de nominación y su pasado. El nudo ficcional es la construcción de un complot y, a la vez, ese complot se superpone con la escritura de una novela. Las múltiples estrategias de lo novelístico que circulan por el texto tienden a funcionar como una conjura destinada a producir efectos en la realidad y a construir un conjunto específico de lectores que actuarán como conjurados ellos mismos. Así, la novela construye a sus lectores como cómplices de una conjura secreta. (27)

Here, the President's project of bringing together a group of friends to conquer the city is mirrored by the novelist's endeavor to bring together a group of readers who might participate in a similar undertaking. The concept of literature that underpins these endeavors posits that, by its very fictional nature, literature produces alterations in the fabric of reality. Politics and fiction are not qualitatively different social practices, but rather are related like the two faces of a coin: politics is grounded in fiction (the state produces a fictional narrative to justify its workings), and fiction "mantiene relaciones cifradas con las maquinaciones del poder, las reproduce, usa sus formas, construye su contrafigura utópica" (*Crítica y ficción* 122). For Piglia, Macedonio's new concept of literature as a conspiracy is symptomatic of the crisis of liberalism in Argentina: against the liberal tradition of viewing politics in terms of negotiation, consensus, and deal-making, Macedonio's avant-garde project reveals the conspiratorial core of the liberal state. To critique modern liberalism, Macedonio introduces a concept of the avant-garde as "una versión conspirativa de la política y del arte, como un complot que experimenta con nuevas formas de sociabilidad, que se infiltra en las instituciones existentes y tiende a destruirlas y a crear redes y formas alternativas" (*Las tres vanguardias* 83). Here Piglia, like Prieto, emphasizes the way in which this practice targets the institutions that structure modern society, taking them as the objects of its destructive critique and proposing alternate forms of sociality. It can thus be said that in Piglia's reading of Macedonio the reconnection of art and life retains a central place, with "life" conceived in terms of the national political life of early-20th-century Argentina. The Macedonian conspiracy offers a model of avant-garde resistance to the modern state, as well as the starting point for a re-formulation of the political community from the standpoint of art.

In the readings of both Prieto and Piglia, the spectacular success of the "Conquista de Buenos Aires" stands as a condensed version of Macedonio's revolutionary project to re-connect

art and life. It is important to recognize, however, that in a significant sense the conquest of the city is *not* successful, *nor* does it point toward the central, organizing principle of Macedonio's novelistic project. To return to the summary of the novel's plot quoted above: the endeavor was designed to bring happiness to the President, "pero él continúa infeliz" (69). In later chapters of the *Museo*, it is described as nothing more than an "entretenimiento" (209), and as a "goce menudo" (209) that does not live up to its lofty aims. Moreover, at the very close of the chapter in which the conquest is narrated, the author-figure interjects in a footnote to apologize for what he feels to be a poorly-executed narrative strategy to win the reader over: "a mi incrédulo y listo lector lo satisfaré confesando que el capítulo es simplemente la obra de un autor en agotamiento, que no da más" (204, footnote). Here, rather than seeing in the "Conquista" the seeds of a literature of the future, the author baldly shifts it to the dustbin of the past, characterizing it as the product of an exhausted mind.

In the same prologue quoted above that sketches the plot of the novel's chapters, the author situates the failure of the conquest of Buenos Aires within an expanded vision of the Presidente's activities, conceived here as a *quadruple* failure. The Presidente, having brought the other characters together for the sake of friendship,

> no se siente satisfecho con la vida de Amistad en la Estancia, pugna por entrar en la acción, y alcanzada plenamente cae en la desilusión de la acción y en el afán de ser feliz por el amor, habiendo antes de formar su grupo de amistad en la Estancia tenido desdén por la Amistad, Acción y Amor y única vocación por la meditación del Misterio, que también hace frustrarse no sólo su contento del éxito de la Acción sino su intento de ser capaz del todo-amor. (69)

Friendship, action, love, and metaphysics ("la meditación del Misterio") are conceived here as four separate vocations explored by the Presidente. The conquest, conceived under the heading of "Acción," is fully realized yet produces disillusion; his search for happiness through friendship and love suffer similar fates. These three options, in turn, were conceived as possible supplements to his prior metaphysical investigations: "[a]ntes y después de la narrativa de la novela, lo que dominó en él fue la meditación metafísica" (*Museo* 69). In the end, however, metaphysics returns to bite the other three modalities in the tail: they were meant to alleviate the "eterno descontento" (69) of the metaphysician-Presidente, but none of them can bring him happiness. The prologue explains that, in this context of failure and discontent, the Presidente proposes a final "solution," where he invites the other characters "a la dispersión para siempre … para nunca saber uno de otro fortunas, desdichas, finales" (70). He names this ending "la Muerte Académica," describing it as a "decisión no insensata para los sin Fe—que somos casi todos" (70), and explains that the "redacción y disposición hilvanada" (70) of the novel are redeemed by this manner of ending in "academic death," "[que] le da grandeza" (70).

Historically, theorists have often identified a certain consciousness of failure as a constitutive moment of avant-garde movements, citing the military origin of the term as an advance guard, but also a group of soldiers destined for slaughter on the front line. Renato Poggioli's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* provides the canonical formulation of this perspective, poetically explaining that, when avant-garde movements exhaust the explosive, agonistic energy that characterizes their early phases, they come to "make dung heaps of themselves for the fertilizing of conquered lands" (68) as they become conscious of, in the best of cases, "being the precursors of the art of the future" (69). A compelling case can be made for reading the *Museo* along these lines: the author demonstrates that he is conscious of the novel's inevitable failure,

and he thus pledges the project to academic death and to posterity. The final epilogue of the *Museo* famously pledges the novel's pages "Al que quiera escribir esta novela" (253), giving its future reader free license to appropriate his theory of the novel and build on the project he has undertaken in its pages. Macedonio's recognition of failure and his bequeathing of his novel to its future readers can thus be interpreted in the broader context of the avant-gardes as oppositional movements destined beforehand to fail in their endeavor to enact radical social change and characterized by what Poggioli calls a "positive defeatism" (68) that culminates in a final, utopian pledge to the future.

This perspective, however, diverges significantly from the understanding of failure that is propounded in the novel. Surprisingly, in the *Museo*, the aspiration to change social life is in fact conceived as something entirely foreign to the novelistic art. At the close of his summary of the novel's plot, the author offers a strong justification for his decision to end the novel in a final act of dispersion (rather than resolution). He argues that the reader who reads a novel in search of a final resolution "busca lo que el arte no debe dar, tiene un interés de lo vital, no en un estado de conciencia: sólo el que no busca una solución es el lector artista" (71). Here the author introduces a key distinction. He insists that the reader who approaches the novel with *vital interest* and concern for how its pages might introduce resolutions applicable to the sphere of life is searching for something that the novel is simply not capable of providing. His ideal reader would abstract away from all concern with discovering solutions to life-related problems. This reader should instead conceive of the novel as an intellectual means for arriving to a particular *state of consciousness* that, as will be shown in the following section, lies at the heart of Macedonio's theory of the novel.

The pages of the *Museo* are filled with readers. The writer repeatedly alludes to his experiences as a reader, the characters read novels and reflect on what it means to be a character in a novel, the diegetic frame of the novel is repeatedly broken to directly address the generic "reader," and a number of different types of readers are explicitly named, each one relating to a distinct modality of novel-reading. Vecchio underlines the centrality of the reader by documenting how Macedonio's use of the novel as a means of liquidating the "ego" or "self" necessarily passes into a critique of the notion of reading. For Vecchio, this opens up the following possibility: "[e]l *Museo de la novela* puede leerse, desde el principio hasta final, como la historia de las sucesivas liquidaciones de Lectores" (*Egocidios* 131). It rejects the reader of realist novels who seeks the illusion of life in the pages of a book; the "Lector de Desenlaces" who insists that her interest must be maintained by suspenseful plots; and the "Lector Seguido" who uses a methodical strategy of reading every word on every page in the correct order, from beginning to end. It also acknowledges the presence of other types of readers whose practices disqualify them from carrying out an adequate reading of the Macedonian novel: the "Lector de Vidriera" who doesn't get beyond the covers of books displayed in shop windows, or the "Lector de Comienzos" who, as the name implies, starts books but does not get past the beginning. By foregrounding the flaws of each type of reader, Macedonio progressively constructs an ideal reader who, in the best of circumstances, will be able to experience the state of consciousness around which Macedonio bases his entire theory of the novel. He presents this theory, among other places, in the "Prólogo a mi persona de autor":

> Es muy sutil, muy paciente, el trabajo de quitar el yo, de desacomodar interiores, identidades. Sólo he logrado en toda mi obra escrita ocho o diez momentos en que, creo, dos o tres renglones conmueven la estabilidad, unidad de alguien, a

> veces, creo, la mismidad del lector. Y sin embargo pienso que la Literatura no existe porque no se ha dedicado únicamente a este Efecto de desidentificación, el único que justificaría su existencia y que sólo esta belarte puede elaborar. (33)

Strictly speaking, for Macedonio literature *cannot exist* if it does not dedicate itself to this work of breaking down the reader's sense of selfhood and shaking the foundations of her interior life. This pursuit is characterized by the patient elaboration of a context in which, in the best of cases, the reader will suddenly experience a punctual undoing of her sense of "selfness." The pursuit of this effect of disidentification constitutes the necessary core of his novelistic project, the point around which the prologues and chapters must revolve. Its presence in the novel, however, is virtual, rather than actual: the point in the novel where the reader will have the experience described by Macedonio cannot be found on any particular page and must rather remain a latent possibility. The following section studies how Macedonio constructs his theory of the novel around this second, subterranean plot whereby the reader, absorbed in the reading of Macedonio's prose, suddenly comes to doubt the veracity of her own existence as a "self," and accesses a vision of existence that is unmoored from the "selfhood" of the individual.

THE SECOND PLOT OF THE *MUSEO*: THE AUTONOMIZATION OF THE MACEDONIAN NOVEL

The earliest typewritten manuscript of the *Museo* bears the date 1929, with some handwritten materials contained in Macedonio's archive dating back perhaps to 1925.[38] At first view this

[38] Ana Camblong, in her preliminary study to the 1993 critical edition of the novel, hypothesizes that early handwritten materials found in Macedonio's archive may date to as early as 1925, a year during which the author "ya estaría escribiendo algunas ideas, algunos fragmentos, algún prólogo de la novela" (Estudio preliminar, lx). She, along with Macedonio's son, Adolfo de Obieta, identifies a manuscript transcribed by Consuelo Bosch de Sáenz Valiente (the woman with whom Macedonio spent the final decades of his life, after his wife Elena's death) and dated "17 de junio de 1929" as the first relatively complete version of the project ("completeness" used here in a relative sense). It is later accompanied by additional typewritten drafts with substantial additions, culminating in the typewritten copy of the novel given to Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz in 1948 (and subsequently lost, only to be found by Scalabrini Ortiz's widow), which Camblong and Obieta use as the source for their edition.

would seem to allow for a general understanding of the book as a product of the later years of the Argentine avant-garde experience and would grant for the following rough panorama of Macedonio's activities during that decade:

1. Early humoristic contributions in 1922 and 1923 to the literary journals *Martín Fierro* and *Proa*, followed by additional, largely humoristic contributions throughout the decade to avant-garde periodicals. Many of these materials were compiled and published in *Papeles de Recienvenido* in 1929.
2. Continued interest in metaphysical investigations, begun in previous decades and culminating in the publication of *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* in 1928.
3. Growing interest in the novel as a genre, beginning in the early 1920s with an initial draft of *Adriana Buenos Aires* and in the later years of the decade, complemented by increasing work on the early manuscripts that would become *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*.

To place the *Museo* in the historical context of the late 1920s, however, quickly opens a series of problems. The existence of manuscripts dating to as late as 1948 evidences the remarkably extended period during which Macedonio worked on the novel, which remained unfinished upon his death in 1952. The campaign for president in 1920 and 1921, Macedonio's public interventions into various aspects of cultural life in Buenos Aires, his famous conversations in bars and private residences, and even his early utopian project in Paraguay, dating to 1897, are all revisited and re-activated in manifold ways in the pages of the *Museo*. It is thus possible to speculate, as Piglia does, that the origins of Macedonio's avant-garde artistic project, of which the *Museo* forms a part, stretch back to the early years of the 20th century.[39] The publication of

[39] See Piglia, *Las tres vanguardias*, especially pp. 75-93. Piglia proposes 1904-1967 as a periodization of the historical avant-gardes in Argentina: "La línea comienza en 1904: es el año constitutivo del presente y de la relación

his early writings in the first volume of his *Obras completas* allows for the tracing of genealogical connections between Macedonio's novel and turn-of-the-century literary culture, as studied by Mónica Bueno in *Macedonio Fernández: un escritor de Fin de Siglo*. Finally, the historicist gesture of situating a historically-circumscribed "work" in a historically-delimited "past" contains its own host of pitfalls.[40]

The following pages nonetheless propose a certain re-situation of the *Museo* into the context of the 1920s by reading it not only in series with his metaphysical and humoristic endeavors, but also alongside his theoretical writings on art and the novel, which also date to the later years of that decade.[41] The later years of the decade represent his first extended work on the project, and his personal correspondence and a series of theoretical texts from those years indicate an increasing interest in the novel, as both a genre and a theoretical problem.[42] In those years, Macedonio was increasingly interested not only in writing a novel, but also in theorizing the novel as a medium for artistic expression contained within the system of the fine arts. [43]

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entre novela y vanguardia en la Argentina porque es cuando Macedonio Fernández comienza a escribir el *Museo de la novela de la Eterna.* Es la ficción de un comienzo. Y llega hasta 1967 porque en ese año se publica el *Museo*. Macedonio empieza a escribirlo en 1904 y la novela se publica póstumamente, en 1967" (78).

[40] In general, those critics who in recent years have made an increasing effort to re-situate Macedonio's work in its historical context have acknowledged the pitfalls of applying traditional literary-historiographic methods to the study of his textual corpus. Authors such as Garth, Bueno, Daniel Attala, and others have sought to overcome these obstacles with increased philological and theoretical rigor, opening up Macedonio's writings to an expanded, global field of influences, and often drawing on the work of historians such as Michel Foucault in their reconstructions of the discursive contexts in which Macedonio's work resonates.

[41] His short text "Para una teoría de la novela" was originally delivered as a radio address in 1928 or 1929. A version was later published in *Revista de las Indias* in 1940. His longer "Para una teoría del arte" was published in Volume 3 of his *Obras completas*. Adolfo de Obieta dates it as prior to the "teoría de la novela," around 1927.

[42] See Volumes two and three of his *Obras completas*, which contain his epistolary correspondence (vol. 2) and his theoretical writings on a variety of subjects (vol. 3). His correspondence with Jorge Luis Borges in the 1920s and 30s is also available in a separate edition, titled *Correspondencia 1922-1939: crónica de una amistad*, and compiled by Carlos García.

[43] The question of the relation between the theoretical writings of Macedonio and his novelistic practices is a thorny one and has traditionally been addressed in the context of debates concerning the essential systematicity, or non-systematicity, of Macedonio's metaphysical, practical, and aesthetic thought. Jitrik identifies two possible manners of approaching Macedonio's body of work and highlights their shared limitations in relation to the "(non-) system" of Macedonio's thought: "Puede decirse de estas dos formas de acercamiento (deducir lo literario de lo teórico o estudiar lo primero al margen de lo segundo) que sus límites estaban marcados, siéndoles difícil, si no imposible, atravesar los datos para llegar a una descripción justificada de un sistema del que estos datos forman solamente

In this context, Macedonio's turn to the novel can initially be understood in terms of a distinction between public and private realms of experience. This distinction, which underpins Macedonio's novel, comes to light in his writings and personal correspondence that deal specifically with the composition, future publication, and consumption of the *Museo*. Camblong, working in Macedonio's personal archive alongside his son, Adolfo de Obieta, groups these materials into a pair of categories. She first speaks of the public itinerary of the text, focusing on the way in which Macedonio deploys a "máquina semiótica descomunal" (Estudio preliminar xxxii) in the Buenos Aires cultural field. He hyped the novel in everyday conversations and at bars and cafés, mentioned it in avant-garde journals, and promised its future completion in correspondence with figures such as Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Enrique Fernández Latour. This work of publicity allowed his not-yet-existent *Museo* to obtain a paradoxical public presence in the literary world, and Macedonio to gain an equally paradoxical fame as an unpublished novelist.

Macedonio accompanied this publicity campaign with a steady stream of documentation regarding the private gestation of his novel. In his correspondence, he places its pages on his cluttered work table alongside his writings on metaphysics and aesthetic theory, making repeated reference to the way they flow into, and continually interrupt, each other. He also mentions periods of waning enthusiasm and a variety of depressive states that cause him to pass days at home without writing, and cites various interruptions, from moments of poor health to workers coming to make repairs on his home, that make his task more difficult. For Camblong, these

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parte" (quoted in Daniel Attala, Review of *The Self of the City* 445). Rather than reading the *Museo* in terms of an overarching Macedonian "system," the reading elaborated here proposes that it be read in terms of two contrasting *series*. Piglia, Prieto, and others position the *Museo* in series with the "Novela salida a la calle," Macedonio's presidential campaign, and other events such as his 1897 trip to Paraguay with a group of friends with plans to found a utopian community. The items in this series demonstrate a shared affinity with the avant-garde aspiration to re-connect art and life. In contrast, the pages of this section propose that the Macedonian novel should *also* be read in a series with his metaphysical and humoristic writings, as well as his theories of art and the novel.

descriptions of the author's private space form the "contracara del itinerario público del texto que *supone* el espacio 'privado,' ese hábitat cuasi-secreto en el que se guarda el texto" (Estudio preliminar xlii; my emphasis). Camblong's recognition that these texts *presuppose* the private space is important. Generations of commentators have highlighted the precariousness of Macedonio's living situation in the years following his wife Elena de Obieta's death in 1920, after which he abandoned the family home and inaugurated a period of constant movement through the city of Buenos Aires, from pension house to pension house. Camblong's study highlights a certain continuity in the midst of this domiciliary flux: the home, the private residence, even if it is located in a noisy pension house, is consistently conceived of as the scene of writing. For Macedonio, writing is intimately linked to privacy, solitude, and seclusion, which form its basic preconditions.

There is ample reason to believe that Macedonio also conceives of reading as a private activity. While he certainly recognizes that people *do* read in public (in shop windows, at kiosks, etc.), he insists that the reading of his novel requires a sustained period of intellectual concentration in a place where the reader will not be distracted by passing circumstances. Macedonio's ideal mode of reading is perhaps best thought of in terms of a movement of total abstraction away from sensorial life, in which the reader's existence is reduced to a succession of purely mental states that are produced through contact with prose writing. Perhaps the most compelling description of the experience of reading comes in Chapter 13 of the *Museo*, in which the narrator describes the Presidente's project to write a novel in line with his "concepción original de 'novelismo de la conciencia' o 'novela sin mundo'" (223). The characters of this novel "no son personas físicas sino conciencias, fueron gente de la vida, estuvieron en el Dualismo o Mundo; viven ahora en el universo del acaecer conciencial, absolutamente

indeterminístico …" (223-224). The characters' transition, from physical existence to a purely "conciential" universe secluded from determinate, corporeal reality, must be accompanied by the reader's parallel transition. To read, for Macedonio, is to become "sin mundo" in a way that allows the reader to enter into a specular relationship with the equally world-less fictional characters that populate his novel. Only in this state of purely intellectual contact with the characters of the novel can the reader experience the moment of cognitive breakdown that forms the center of Macedonio's theory of the novel. This escape from life, from dualism or the world, has as its absolute precondition the private setting where the solitary reader can most fully abstract away from the surrounding life-world.[44]

Camblong's thematic distinction between "public" and "private" spheres, in which Macedonio's gaze extends outward toward the public (non-)existence of his novel, but also inward, toward the private scene in which the novelist writes his novel (a scene which finds its ideal complement in the private scene of reading), provides a compelling criterion for re-framing critical discussions of Macedonio's *Museo.* In recent decades, scholars have tended to situate the "Conquista de Buenos Aires" at the center of their readings, prioritizing the manner in which his novel expands outward into the public sphere, shattering institutional barriers and taking to the street. There are indeed compelling points of contact between Macedonio's artistic project and this 20th-century movement to reconnect art with public life. The following pages, however,

[44] One additional point of clarification is necessary: in a key scene in the *Museo*, the characters come together to read some pages out loud from a novel titled *Adriana Buenos Aires*, and in the novel's final prologue (which comes after these chapters), Macedonio clarifies that "la verdadera ejecución de mi teoría novelística sólo podría cumplirse escribiendo la novela de varias personas que se juntan para leer otra novela, de manera que ellas, lectores-personajes, lectores de la otra novela personajes de ésta, se perfilarán incesantemente como personas existentes, no personajes, por contrachoque con las figuras e imágenes de la novela por ellos mismos leída" (253-254). In line with the reading proposed here, this should not imply that Macedonio conceives of reading as an ideally *collective* experience. Rather, these reader-characters, and this scene of reading, should be taken as specular inversions of Macedonio's vision of the scene of reading in the real world. The way that the characters read is the exact opposite of the way that *people* should ideally read the Macedonian novel. The following pages will flesh out this difference by studying Macedonio's theory of character, as well as his theory of prose.

attempt show that the *Museo* is also traversed by an inverse movement, in which the novelist pursues the literary and philosophical possibilities inherent to the fundamentally private experience of reading a novel.

For this private experience to be possible, Macedonio insists that the novel's world must exist in a state of perfect autonomy with respect to the world of the reader. In this sense, he situates his novel at the opposite pole from the realist novel, which aspires to establish a perfect continuity between novelistic and extra-novelistic realities. When Macedonio refers to realism, he speaks of any attempt to reproduce reality and to make characters' lives unfold as if they were living in the historical, extra-textual world. Macedonio considers these reproduced realities to be spurious and dedicates much of his institutional-critical energy to laying bare the core devices that structure realist representation. He acknowledges that novels *can* convincingly reproduce reality (that is, a reader can lose herself in the world of a novel), but he insists that this does not constitute art: "[l]as tentativas de alucinación de realidad en el Realismo son eficaces, pero no artísticas: al contrario, parece que van directamente contra el Arte" ("Para una teoría del arte" 241). Macedonio considers art to be "por esencia lo sin realidad, lo limpiamente inauténtico, exento de la miseria informativa, instructiva" ("Para una teoría del arte" 241), and he sets out in the *Museo* to construct a textual space characterized by an absolute non-relation to the extra-textual world that the realist novel aims to reconstruct: "[e]l anhelo que me animó en la construcción de mi novela fue crear un hogar, hacerla un hogar para la no-existencia" (22). These assertions of the novel's worldlessness, and of the non-existence that characterizes the ontological status of the characters who inhabit its pages (their "home"), form the foundation for Macedonio's theory of the novel. They establish the originary, irrevocable autonomy of a

novelistic world that Macedonio takes pains to rigorously distinguish from that of the realist novel, which attempts to hallucinate a reproduction of the extra-novelist or "real" world.

The following pages, drawing largely from the *Museo* and from the theoretical writings compiled in the *Teorías* volume of his *Obras completas*, aim to reconstruct the central elements of his theory, as they result from this initial postulation of the novel's rigorous non-relation between novelistic and extra-novelistic worlds. After an initial discussion of how his rejection of realism relates to Adorno's theory of the monadological (or autonomous) work of art, they study three key elements of Macedonio's theory of the novel: 1) his insistence on its medium-specificity; 2) his identification of the character as the central narratological category of the novel, the element that constitutes the novel's specificity as an artistic medium; and, 3) his theory of artistic prose, which emphasizes prose writing's unique capacity to produce a cognitive experience in the reader of a specifically emotional nature. Together, these elements form an interlocking foundation for a theory of the novel that seeks to convincingly argue in favor of the novelistic medium's capacity to produce the experience of cognitive breakdown that, for Macedonio, is the only justifiable objective toward which modern art should aspire.

Macedonio's insistence on the absolute seclusion of the novelistic world from the real world demonstrates important affinities with Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.[45] For Adorno, works of art exist as "what rationalist metaphysics proclaimed as the principle of the universe, a monad"

[45] Vecchio recognizes the centrality of the concept of autonomy to Macedonio's theory of the novel, but he rejects the idea of comparing Macedonio and Adorno, based primarily on what he sees as their divergent understandings of the culinary: "El Arte Culinaria de Macedonio no tiene nada que ver con el Arte Industrial. Macedonio Fernández no es Theodor Adorno" (*Egocidios* 73). However, a brief analysis of the uses of the term in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* underscores that both authors are indeed using the term in a similar fashion. While Adorno does associate the culinary with the art produced by the culture industry, he, like Macedonio, tends to ground his use of the term in a more general understanding of the pursuit of sensuality in art. Adorno often speaks of the pursuit of pleasing harmonies in music, for example, as culinary. Adorno explains that, over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, this and other culinary tendencies slowly became incorporated into the canons of bourgeois aesthetics, and from there became key components of the mass-produced art of the 20th century.

(*Aesthetic* 179), which he also defines as "that living autarchy that Goethe was fond of calling entelechy" (179). They are objects that are at once absolutely complete in themselves yet absolutely separate from the world; however, Adorno dialectically adds that "in their hermeticism they represent what is external" (179). This is precisely the indirect relationship between the world of the work and the world of the reader that is championed by Macedonio. The success of the novel is ultimately predicated on the prior recognition of its irrevocable autonomy, which Macedonio defines as a sort of hermetic non-correspondence between the novelistic "hogar para la no-existencia" and the external world. Where Adorno stresses how, by forming her materials, the artist removes them from the realm of the empirical and grants them a distinct ontological status, Macedonio equally insists on the manner in which art, by its very nature, implies a radical break with reality: "o el arte está demás, o nada tiene que ver con la realidad; sólo así es real, así como los elementos de la realidad no son copias unos de otros" (qtd. in Del Barco 469). This dialectical turn, whereby only by having nothing to do with reality does a work of art become real, would not be out of place in Adorno, and it underlines the degree to which Macedonio's theory of the novel, like Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, relies on a rigorous defense of the autonomy of the work of art.

Adorno's discussion of how aesthetic experience culminates in a fleeting revelation of the work's truth content demonstrates a second important affinity with Macedonio, who also conceives of the novel as pointing toward a true glimpse of reality as an "Almismo ayoico" that transcends the selfhood of the reader. Adorno most commonly refers to this as the "shock" or "shudder" generated by important works of art, describing it as "the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken" (*Aesthetic* 244). This moment, in which recipients "lose their footing" (244), is more precisely defined by

Adorno as an "*Erfahrung*" (245), which in German refers to a full, comprehending modality of experience that stands in contrast to the everyday lived experience designated by the German *Erlebnis*. This *Erfahrung* involves the radical destabilization of the recipient's self: "Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience (*Erlebnis*), provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude" (*Aesthetic* 245). This formulation, and its specific association of aesthetic experience with the destruction of the self, is remarkably akin to a number of statements made by Macedonio concerning the novel's aspiration to produce the above-mentioned traumatic effect of disidentification or "conmoción conciencial" (*Obras* 2: 13). For Macedonio as well, art must singularly dedicate itself to the pursuit of an experience of reality radically de-linked from the reader's sense of self, as he stresses in the following passage defining the ultimate objective of his novelistic project:

> [C]omo fin busco la liberación [del lector] de la noción de muerte: la evanescencia, trocabilidad, rotación, turnación del yo [producido por la Literatura] lo hace inmortal, es decir no ligado su destino al de su cuerpo (Por lo demás, este Cuerpo no es más que un complejo de imágenes en mi sensibilidad, la misma ligada aparentemente a este Cuerpo, u otra sensibilidad asociada a otro Cuerpo). (34)

While there are important differences between the philosophical contents of the respective experiences defined by Adorno and Macedonio, the form of the experience they describe in their respective theories is remarkably similar: in both cases, contact with the monadological work of art, which relates to its recipient by way of its absolute non-relation with the everyday life-world, culminates in a moment of denegation of the self. For both Adorno and Macedonio, the very

possibility of art is linked to its capacity to elicit this experience. Finally, and importantly, both authors frame the possibility of this experience in terms of a common pessimism regarding social modernization. They believe that modernization leads to a progressive impoverishment of experience, and art, for both Adorno and Macedonio, becomes a vehicle for transcending a fallen social reality conceived in terms of the increasingly total administration of society (Adorno), or the maximalistic inflation of the state (Macedonio).

To understand why Macedonio believes that the novel can produce this sort of experience, it is necessary to make a brief detour into his consideration of what defines the novel as an art form. Macedonio, like Adorno, tends to rely on a system of distinctions between the arts that both authors inherit from the classical tradition, in which the history of art is conceived in terms of the relatively autonomous development of each medium (such as music or painting) based on the materials inherent to each medium, as well as the medium-specific procedures for forming or shaping these materials employed by artists. While Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* focuses most heavily on music and painting, Macedonio goes to great lengths to elevate the novel to the status of a distinct art form within a system of fine arts that includes music, opera, theater, painting, dance, architecture, and silent film, each one clearly differentiated from the others, and each one possessing its own innermost quality.[46] In a manner that brings him close to

[46]Prieto, alluding primarily to the "Conquista" and its ties to the series of Macedonio's extra-novelistic pursuits discussed above, emphasizes the "carácter transdiscursivo e intermedial al que propenden la escritura macedoniana y en particular su proyecto de política-ficción" (*De la sombrología* 87). However, this reading, which conceives Macedonio's diverse artistic activities as a single inter-medial (or multi-media) project, contrasts with Macedonio's insistence on preserving the specificity of prose writing (of which the novel forms a sub-genre), or what he calls "el arte literario o belarte de la Palabra" ("Para una teoría del arte" 245). See also Prieto's comparison of Macedonio and Marcel Duchamp, from the same essay quoted above: "Como el *Gran Vidrio* [de Duchamp], el proyecto político-ficcional de Macedonio se desarrolla al menos en dos medios: un medio textual—los volantes y escritos diversos de propaganda presidencial-novelesca en cuya órbita se insertaría inestablemente la escritura del *Museo de la Novela*— y un medio urbanístico o 'psicogeográfico'—las calles de Buenos Aires como escenario de una serie de acciones artístico-políticas que incluirían la ejecución de una 'novela salida a la calle'" (*De la sombrología* 71). Prieto's description of his object of study (Macedonio's "politico-fictional project") is perhaps indebted to Piglia's approach to Macedonio, as is his dissolution of the *Museo* into the context of a broader "project" that encompasses the "Novela salida a la calle," the presidential campaign, and so on. Prieto's recognition of the "unstable" insertion of

the writings of Clement Greenberg on painting, Macedonio vehemently insists on the medium-specificity of the novel. He conceives of the novel as a distinct artistic medium that coexists with, but which *must not be contaminated by*, painting, poetry, music, and silent film, among others, as is apparent in programmatic statements such as the following one, taken from "Para una teoría de la novela":

> El verso, el recitado, la oratoria, el canto con palabras, la ópera, el teatro dramático y el ensayismo literario enredado con didáctica o ciencia, son espurias. *Cuanto más arte diferente se combina menor es su poder*. El cine mudo y sin membrete es un tipo de arte puro precioso, como la palabra escrita o hablada sin gesto, inflexión ni lujos de bella voz. ("Para una teoría de la novela" 255; emphasis mine)

Traditionally, discussions of medium specificity have centered on the identification of each medium's core competency. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's foundational *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting* critiques the idea of the translatability of the arts expressed in the statement *ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting, so is poetry"). It argues that poetry should avoid description (which amounts to the painting of pictures with words) and instead favor the narration of actions due to the consecutive nature of language; painting, on the other hand, due to the immediate, simultaneous manner in which the viewer takes in a given work, should avoid the allegorical telling of stories and focus instead detailed depictions of the sorts of powerful moments that best lend themselves to visual representation. Clement Greenberg, whose "Modernist Painting" and "Towards a Newer *Laocoön*" constitute the canonical 20th-century texts on medium-specificity, employs a similar approach in identifying the flatness of the pictorial canvas as painting's

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the *Museo* into this series of sub-projects can be taken to mark the point where the reading of the *Museo* developed in this section branches out from both his reading and Piglia's.

innermost quality. Macedonio shares this conception of an inherent division of the arts based on essential qualities. In the above example, silent film's unique capacity to capture the human figure in motion is sullied by the inclusion of written intertitles, and writing (or spoken language) is tarnished by embellishments such as theatrical gestures or the pursuit of musical intonations. Macedonio's novelistic practices tend toward the ideal presented at the end of the first quote: he insists that the novel must be constructed from a prose writing exempt of musicality and of rhetorical "lujos de bella voz," and employ a neutral, anesthetic tone that avoids the vicissitudes (from Macedonio's perspective) of the pursuit of the sort of artistic or musical language that occupied a prominent place in earlier *modernista* prose.[47]

One could thus say that if for Greenberg the history of modernist painting centers on the critical pursuit of flatness, Macedonio's understanding of the history of the novel, which grants pride of place to authors such as Miguel de Cervantes and Lawrence Sterne due to their early interest in the ontological status of the character, arrives at the character as the innermost, essential quality of the novelistic medium. He defines the novel, in distinction to other art forms, as a "Prosa de Personajes o Novelística" (*Museo* 108), and his many attempts to define the *conmoción conciencial* share a common emphasis on the fact that, for the novel to transcend the trivial occupation of the reader's consciousness and rise above the level of what Adorno

[47] Macedonio's condemnation of artistic mixtures is ultimately grounded in his particular interpretation of late-19th-and-early-20th-century psychological theory, as evidenced in the following quote: "Arte de un solo órgano: artes simultáneas combinadas—danza y música, literatura y seudomúsica de sonoridad, rima y medida que no son música tampoco—son monstruos, imposibles psicológicos, porque psicológicamente no se funden, ni se perciben distintos simultáneamente, ni se confirman o enfatizan mutuamente en el sentir psíquico, aunque se asemejen o repitan en la percepción intelectual, es decir en frío, son inestéticos" ("Para una teoría del arte" 242). Such mixtures are monstrous or spurious because the idea of a combined, simultaneous effect produced by dance set to music, for example, cannot be justified if one believes, as Macedonio does, that an individual's perceptual apparatus works by attuning itself to one input at a time. It is the simultaneity of visual and auditory perceptions that is spurious, as is the simultaneity of cognitive and auditory perceptions in the case of a musical prose.

describes as *Erlebnis* or lived experience, it must rely exclusively on the character, the instrument it shares with no other art.[48]

Situating himself at the antipode of the realist endeavor to "hallucinate" living, breathing characters in the novel's pages, Macedonio's novel endeavors to inaugurate what he calls "la función metafísica única artística de los Personajes como fundadores o dadores de Inexistencia al propio Lector" (*Museo* 108). This granting of inexistence takes place through the following mechanism:

> La Novela … usa de los personajes operados o funcionados, no para hacer creer en ellos (realismo pueril), sino para hacer "personaje" al Lector, atentando incesantemente a su certeza de existencia, por procedimientos que tratan de hacer desempeñarse como "personas" a "personajes" para, por contragolpe, hacer personaje al Lector. Es lo único artístico obtenible con la palabra de la prosa a personajes, único fin que no puede lograrse con otra belarte. (*Para una teoría del arte* 248)

Fictional characters are traditionally assumed to cause the reader to believe in the reality (or at least the plausibility) of their existence. Macedonio's novel, on the other hand, wants to convince the reader of the reality of her existence *as a character* and thus trouble the certainty of her existence as a living, breathing human being with a personal identity. As Daniel Attala explains, this effort can be viewed in terms of logical impossibility: Macedonio's characters appear within the diegetic world of the novel *precisely as characters*. Comparing the novelistic character with

[48] A prologue situated in the opening pages of the *Museo* gives evidence of the importance Macedonio places on the novelistic character: he insists that, although his novel may be a failure, "quisiera se me reconociera que soy el primero que ha usado el prodigioso instrumento de conmoción conciencial que es el personaje de novela en su verdadera eficiencia y virtud: la de la conmoción *total* de la conciencia, y no la de la ocupación trivial de la conciencia en un tópico particular, efímero, precario… (18).

the theatrical mask, Attala explains that "las máscaras, por definición, *son lo que no habla*, de lo contrario no podría servir como medio a través de lo cual se habla" (*Macedonio* 59; emphasis in original). It is precisely concerning the question of breathing that this distinction is often noted in the pages of the *Museo*. Macedonio's characters, in short, do not breathe. Instead, they interrogate each other about what it must be like to breath: ¿[h]as visto el Respirar de los que viven? ¡Qué misterio! ¿Qué ansia será que nosotros nunca sentiremos, *respirar*? ¡Qué dignidad, qué comunión con el cosmos!" (*Museo* 205). Macedonio's novel aspires to establish a system of distinctions such as this: his characters, who look out on and observe the real world inhabited by readers, yearn for an impossible humanity. Their very despair at their lack of humanity, in turn, generates a growing sense of pathos in the reader, who cannot avoid connecting with them on a human level.

The Macedonian novel relies on the possibility that this process of identification will culminate in a sudden dialectical reversal, in which the reader comes to momentarily believe that she herself is a character rather than a person. Attala emphasizes that this treatment of the character as a "técnica de liberación del lector" (*Macedonio* 52), must be understood in conjunction with Macedonio's reception of Cervantes's *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. When, in the second part of the *Quixote*, Don Quixote comes to see that he is a character in a book that many people have read, and when he arrives at a publishing house in Barcelona and encounters the book that purportedly documents his adventures, he sees that while he believes himself to be a "person," he exists in the lives of the people he meets as a character. As Attala puts it, "[Don Quijote] asume, de un golpe y plenamente, su ser de *personaje* convirtiéndose de este modo en el primer verdadero personaje—conciente de serlo—de la historia literaria" (*Macedonio* 51). At the moment when Don Quixote is confronted with his existence as a character, he attains a

maximum of "humanity," causing the reader to partake in an inverse experience as she is overcome by a dawning awareness of her own existence as a character. In an oft-cited passage from "Para una teoría de la novela," Macedonio describes this experience as it takes place for his ideal reader of the *Quixote*:

> Leed nuevamente el pasaje en que el Quijote se lamenta de que Avellaneda publique una inexacta historia de él; pensad esto: un "personaje" con "historia." Sentiréis un mareo; creeréis que Quijote vive al ver a este "personaje" quejarse de que se hable de él, de su vida. Aun un mareo más profundo: hecho vuestro espíritu por mil páginas de lectura a creer lo fantástico, tendréis el escalofrío de si no seréis vosotros, que os creéis al contrario vivientes, un "personaje" sin realidad. (qtd. in Attala, *Macedonio* 52)

This moment of cognitive trauma, in which both character and reader come to question the nature of their existence, relies on an initial marking of the distinction between the two. For a character to see herself as a person, and vice versa, there must be a degree of separation. Macedonio's theory of character is thus structured by his assertion of a relation of absolute autonomy between reader and character: paraphrasing Adorno, Macedonio might say that the novelistic character's autonomy is irrevocable.

Attala stresses that Macedonio's use of character takes part in a larger dialogue about the status of the character that took shape in Europe and Latin America following the success of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which debuted in Buenos Aires not long after its first representation in Italy in August, 1922.[49] Pirandello's play, as well as his 1927

[49]As Macedonio humorously puts it in the later years of the decade, "[h]oy en literatura reina obsesión con los *personajes*, y yo mismo algo haré de esto, porque si uno no hace lo que todos se duda de su originalidad" ("Para una teoría del arte" 237).

visit to Argentina, inspired numerous discussions in literary circles concerning the philosophical and narratological nature of the relationship between the reality of the person and the fictionality of the character.[50] In this context, a key problem emerges for Macedonio. Pirandello's *Six Characters* foregrounds the way in which the theatrical stage mediates everyday life by serving as the setting for staged representations of human interactions. His plays, in short, reveal the way in which actors become "talking masks," shedding their humanity when they cross onto the stage. Macedonio, for his part, must figure out how the novel, which, especially in the realist tradition, has often aspired to elide those processes of staging, can carry out similar investigations of character. The realist novel, in short, lacks a stage: its world is purportedly the real world.

Macedonio acknowledges the need to construct something like a novelistic "stage" when speaks of the novel as "un hogar para la no-existencia" (*Museo* 22). In the *Museo*, he works to create such a "home" by linking together three concepts, the *novel*, the *estancia* (the country estate), and the *museum*. The chapters of his novel are set on an estate outside of Buenos Aires called "[la] Estancia la Novela" (128). As Attala explains, this name "expone, en forma alegórica, la naturaleza del personaje: su universo ficcional es por entero y abiertamente subsidiario de la narración que los emplaza y más aún: que los escribe" (*Macedonio* 64). This

[50] Attala also mentions the continuing presence in literary-theoretical discussions of Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla*, published in 1914, which culminates in the famous encounter of the character, Augusto Pérez, with his author-creator. Attala helpfully highlights a radical distinction between Unamuno and Macedonio's respective approaches to character: "Es verdad que en *Niebla* el protagonista se apersona en Salamanca y se planta ante su 'creador' para echarle en cara una verdad muy similar a la que Macedonio espera dar al lector con su novela: 'no es usted más que otro ente nivolesco,' le lanza, un ente 'de ficción.' Pero lo cierto es que para Macedonio esta no es *una verdad*; es, casi por el contrario, un absurdo, el absurdo que dará acceso al estado místico de desaparición de la muerte del horizonte de la subjetividad. Y se notará que Augusto, el personaje de *Niebla,* al echarle en cara aquella 'verdad' a su autor, busca por completo otra cosa: 'Pues bien, mi señor creador don Miguel, ¡también usted se morirá, también usted, y se volverá a la nada de que salió…! ¡Dios dejará de soñarle!' [Aquí] Unamuno revela muy otra intención que Macedonio: potenciar más que disminuir la realidad del personaje, quiero decir entonces de la *persona*, mientras que lo que a Macedonio le interesa potenciar es la realidad del lector" (102).

allegorical act of naming, which removes the country estate from the real world and enacts its essential fictionality, is complemented by an inscription that, in the initial description of the *estancia*, is placed above the two pillars that protect its entryway: "Aquí dejad vuestros pasados," it reads: "Transponedme y vuestro pasado no os seguirá" (*Museo* 129). The inscription emphasizes this categorial distinction between a social world where time is conceived in terms of past, present, and future, and the timeless world of the *estancia*. Throughout the *Museo*, Macedonio seeks to establish the estate as a world where the categories of time, space, and causality lose their validity: the people whom the Presidente meets and invites to live with him become characters and are shorn of their humanity when they cross the threshold.

The novel is on various occasions referred to as a museum, and the posthumous publications all bear this name, which Macedonio first proposed in a 1938 draft of the novel.[51] In the history of the avant-gardes, the museum is viewed as one of the core institutional manifestations of art's autonomy: when a work of art passes across the threshold of the museum, it bids farewell to its relation to lived experience and is sealed off from the workings of everyday life. In a museum, art works are converted into timeless objects for the aesthetic contemplation of museum-goers. The characters of Macedonio's novel experience this passage, but, rather than conceiving this mechanism of museification as something to be overcome, it is a necessary precondition. In order to play their assigned role, the characters must enter the museum-like *estancia*, shedding every possible connection with the realm of everyday social existence that stands on the outside of the novel's stage-like country estate. By insisting on a relation of absolute impossibility between living person and fictional character, as well as by constructing a novelistic "stage" for these characters to reflect on their own fictional nature, Macedonio

[51] See Camblong, "Estudio preliminar" pp. lxxiii-lxxiv for a complete list of the titles used by Macedonio in the *Museo*'s various drafts.

grounds his theory of the novel in an assertion of autonomy similar to that of Adorno: the moment that the characters cross the threshold at the entryway of the "Estancia la Novela," they are relieved of their empirical existence, and thus come to exist in a state of absolute autonomy with respect to the novel's reader. The reader of the Macedonian novel, in turn, will ultimately come to experience this separation as the traumatic effect of disidentification described above, which will offer a glimpse of existence beyond her sensations and representations of the world.

One final (and somewhat lengthy) digression concerning the nature of prose writing is necessary to understand why Macedonio believes that it is possible for the act of reading a novel to produce this experience. If his theory of the novel, which he defines succinctly as a "Prosa de Personajes," is dependent on the ontological status that the novelistic character assumes due to its radical autonomy from the extra-novelistic world, it is equally dependent on Macedonio's understanding of the mechanisms through which his artistic prose interacts with the reader's mental apparatus.[52] In short, Macedonio emphasizes that for the reader to have the experience toward which his novel is singularly dedicated, the author must maintain a consistent, disciplined use of written prose, the material out of which the writer forms the novel.

Macedonio defines prose in terms of its independence from elements of all other artistic mediums: it is, fundamentally, "ni de palabra musicada (metro, rima, sonoridad) ni de pintura escrita, descripciones" (*Museo* 45). He repeats this gesture in the following quote, where he presents his general understanding of the specificity of prose:

> La Prosa busca, pues, mediante la palabra escrita, que tiene el privilegio de hallarse exenta de toda impureza de sensorialidad, la obtención de estados de

[52] In Macedonio's theory of art, the novel (and its characters) exist within the broader category of "el arte literario o belarte de la Palabra [pura]" ("Para una teoría del arte" 245), which Macedonio more succinctly describes as a "Belarte palabra o 'prosa'" (245).

> ánimo de tipo emocional, es decir ni activos ni representativos, o sea la ley estética, cumplida sólo con la palabra escrita, de que el instrumento o medio de un arte no debe tener intrínsecamente, en sí mismo, ningún agrado, lo que no pasa con los colores en pintura, los voluptuosos acordes en música, etcétera. La palabra hablada, sin sonoridades, inflexiones, bella voz, gestos, vale lo mismo que la palabra escrita para la Prosa, pero siempre la voz humana tiene alguna sensorialidad; victorioso queda el insípido garabato, gusanillo del papel, que se llama escritura, que ningún arte posee, absolutamente libre de impurezas" ("Para una teoría del arte" 245).

Prose is privileged in comparison with painting and music because it can purify itself of sensorial contents and thus fulfill the "aesthetic law" that the instrument or medium of an art should not produce sensual pleasure.[53] For Macedonio, painting and music will never fully achieve this because colors and chords are fatally destined to produce moments of voluptuousness. In the final analysis, the spoken word also falls short: even in a hyperbolic pursuit of a neutral speaking voice, speech can never, in Macedonio's view, transcend the sensual. He posits prose writing as the *only* art that can absolutely purify itself of sensorial qualities. In a somewhat proto-Derridean fashion, Macedonio's theory of prose finds its model *not* in the human voice, but instead in the

[53] This privileged status granted to writing over and against music marks a point of contrast with one of Macedonio's key philosophical inspirations, Arthur Schopenhauer, who granted music that privileged place as the only artistic medium that could, perhaps, transcend the listener's psychic representations and provide an experience of the noumenal realm that he terms the "will." In *No todo es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos*, Macedonio situates his pursuit of an artistic prose in the context of a Schopenhauerian problematic: speaking to his interlocutor, a time-traveling Thomas Hobbes who has visited the author in Buenos Aires, Macedonio states the following: "¿Qué me dices, Hobbes? ¿Y yo, *que estoy nuevamente en mi tema obsesionante de la versión verbal de la Música*?" (*No todo es vigilia* 250; emphasis added). Macedonio's pursuit of a truly artistic prose can be thought of as an attempt to respond to Schopenhauer's understanding of music by encountering a means of granting literature that same sort of privileged status within the broader set of artistic mediums.

oft-disparaged written word.[54] Language, shorn of all sensorial links in prose writing, will therefore be free to pursue its essential objective: the obtaining of a specific type of "estado de ánimo" in the reader, which Macedonio defines as emotional in nature.

Macedonio's theory of artistic prose is grounded in this radical separation of art from sensual experience: across his body of writing, he consistently condemns tendencies such as the use of versification, rhyme, rhythm, and consonance in poetry, the use of vibrant colors and smooth, pleasing lines in painting, the use of harmonies thought to be pleasing to the ear in music, and the use of melodrama in theater. For Macedonio, these pursuits of sensuousness are not art at all, but are rather what he calls "culinary": "he llamado desdeñosamente culinaria a todo arte que se aproveche de lo sensorial, por su agrado en sí, no como signo de emoción a suscitar" ("Para una teoría del arte" 236).[55] He critiques these tendencies by essentially condemning them as all too "realist" in the end: employing a broad definition of realism, he associates the culinary with any endeavor to use art to produce sensual, rather than intellectual, pleasure in the reader. Macedonio's theory of prose aspires to purify artistic prose of all traces of the culinary, and in doing so establish the bases for an understanding of reading in which the

[54] A thorough discussion of the relation between Macedonio and Derrida exceeds the scope of this chapter. While this reversal of the binary relation between speech and writing bears a certain similarity to Derrida's work, Macedonio's insistence on the possibility of a prose writing *absolutely free of impurities* runs against the tenor of Derrida's project. Elsewhere, Macedonio insists on a similarly rigid conception of the absolute anteriority of thought with respect to language, a position that was deconstructed by Derrida in his early work on Husserl. In *No todo es vigilia*, for example, Macedonio includes the following apology for language-related difficulties which he takes to be inevitable due to his understanding of the relation between thought and language: "[l]as inadecuaciones verbales en que acabo de incurrir e incurriré y que en todas las lecturas de metafísica tropezamos, es una dolencia de la comunicación de ideas, no de su gestión mental, pues en primer término la palabra es instrumento de comunicación y no de pensamiento; se piensa con percepciones e imágenes, se comunica esto con palabras, es decir, se suscitan estas mismas imágenes en otro" (*No todo es vigilia* 255). This insistence on the absolute anteriority of thought with respect to language is entirely foreign to Derrida's theoretical perspective.

[55] Macedonio's use of the term "culinary" as a pejorative designation once again echoes Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: the modern works favored by Adorno are united in their pursuit of a truth content beyond the fallen, capitalist world, and he insists that "[an aesthetics] that does not move within the perspective of truth fails its task; usually it is culinary" (47).

reader, by establishing a purely intellectual interaction with the novelist's artistic prose, would eventually be led to an experience that is emotional, rather than sensual, in nature.

The vocabulary of sensoriality, "estados de ánimo," and emotions, which draws on Macedonio's metaphysical investigations, as well as his understanding of human psychology, requires significant unpacking. For Macedonio, the term "estado" encompasses "toda ocurrencia de la sensibilidad, o sea: sentimientos, sensaciones de dolor y placer e imágenes" (*No todo es vigilia* 332). There is nothing outside of *estados* in the Macedonian metaphysics, which conceives of being as a singular, phenomenal field. As one of the chapter titles of *No todo es vigilia* reads, "[l]os estados no ocurren en la sensibilidad. Son la Sensibilidad, el Ser, el Mundo" (299). Along these lines, Macedonio views being as "siempre, además de pleno, inmediato" (329). Reality is conceived on the model of a singular soul without a self which is anterior to all determinations and in the last instance can be *felt* rather than understood conceptually: "El campo fenomenal que llamamos Mundo, Ser, Realidad, Experiencia, es uno solo y por tanto indenominable: el de 'lo sentido' le llamaremos todavía, ni externo ni interno, ni psíquico ni material" (245).[56] The effect of disidentification that Macedonio's novel incessantly pursues is meant to generate, in the consciousness of the reader, a vision of this reality in which the self dissolves into a universal sensibility and distinctions between subject and object lose their meaning.

Macedonio makes a further distinction between two categories of *estados*: representative states and affective states. The latter includes the emotional states that prose must dedicate itself to pursuing, while the category of representative states includes both sensations and images, the

[56] It is important to note that the experience that Macedonio is pursuing will not take place on the conceptual level. Without mincing words, he divorces his artistic project from the labor of the concept in Hegel's philosophy: "con separación y énfasis asevero ahora que nadie es más fuerte, más severo, más serio y especializado que yo en metafísica no discursiva, la que olvidó Hegel y que se da en la artística, que yo preconizo" (*Museo* 34).

difference between the two having to do with whether the represented object is present or absent.[57] Macedonio also considers perceptions to be representative states in which the individual's psychic apparatus associates sensations and images. Conceptual work takes place on the level of perceptions, as does the metaphysician's labor of undoing the sedimented layers of apperceptions that occlude the individual's primordial participation in being.[58] Affective states, on the other hand, relate to pleasure and pain, as well as energies and desires. They are conceived as ontologically prior to representations, on the model of Schopenhauer's assertion of the prior nature of Will (which Macedonio defines as "Affection") vis-à-vis the world of the individual's representations: "Ante todo hay un mundo, y es el único importante, el de la Afección (deseos, energías, dolor, placer) que no es repetición de nada ni previo a nada, ni accesible subjetivo a terceros" (*No todo es vigilia* 263).

There are two types of affective states. First, "estados de estímulo periférico" (*No todo es vigilia* 328), that is, simple states of pleasure or pain that relate to physiological processes, such as when one touches the handle of a red-hot frying pan or hears a voluptuous chord at a concert. Second, emotions, which derive from a sequence of perceptual states unfolding in the mind. As Attala points out, these two categories of affection are best conceived as a sort of continuum: at one extreme would be a class of pleasures and pains almost entirely reducible to the body's physiological processes; at the other would lie the subclass of "*emociones puras* o *puramente*

[57] "Nosotros llamaremos siempre sensación a todo estado psíquico de causa actual e imagen a toda reviviscencia o evocación de cualquier estado pasado" (*Obras completas* 8: 139). This distinction holds not only for the visual, but also for the other senses as well. In Macedonio's understanding of the human psyche, one can just as easily produce images of touches, smells, noises, etc.

[58] While much of Macedonio's early writings tended to conceive of metaphysics as ultimately dedicated to arriving at a state of pure perception, of "Percepción perfecta, la acquiencia intelectual plena con la existencia de la Existencia, del Fenómeno, del Ser, de la Realidad" (*Obras completas* 8: 47) , by *No todo es vigilia* he insists that the state of Passion he is seeking through his metaphysics is ultimately emotional in nature: the metaphysician works through layers of sedimented apperceptions, but the process culminates in an emotional state: "[Pasión] es sin duda un estado emocional, pero es también metafísico" (*No todo es vigilia* 335). Here the metaphysical moment of full acquiescence to Being is experienced not as a perception but as an emotional state.

intelectuales, definidas por la máxima distancia posible capaz de mediar entre ellas y el mundo mecánico, animal, de los estímulos periféricos" (Attala, *Macedonio* 40; emphasis in original). The effect to which literature must singularly dedicate itself falls into this latter subclass. Macedonio conceives it as the "pure emotion" that occurs when the reader's intellectual processing of perceptions momentarily breaks down.[59] It can only be pursued by a prose that maintains the reader on a thin tightrope of perceptions, and which is exempt of all aspiration to produce peripheral affective states.[60]

This intellectual prose is the primordial material out of which the *Museo* is constructed. A pair of passages from the novel's chapters illustrate the specific qualities of this prose, as well as highlight how Macedonio safeguards his prose from the encroachment of the "culinary." The first comes from the novel's chapters: the Presidente, addressing himself to Eterna, notices tears in her eyes and reflects on their significance:

> Esas lágrimas que sólo cual en tus ojos se dieron jamás, son la más alta línea de ola que se ha alzado en el Ser o Realidad, son la suprema obra del Mundo, de tal belleza cual una cumplida Razón de Ser, luego de la cual también el cese de la

[59] Macedonio's linking of literature and pure emotion recalls the position taken by a young Jorge Luis Borges in "Anatomía de mi ultra," a text published in the Madrid journal *Ultra* in 1921. Borges writes: "[y]o—y nótese bien que hablo de intentos y no de realizaciones colmadas—anhelo un arte que traduzca la emoción desnuda, depurada de los adicionales datos que la preceden. Un arte que rehuyese lo dérmico, lo metafísico y los últimos planos egocéntricos o mordaces" ("Anatomía" 103). He explains that his position contrasts with the customary behavior of poets who have always sought to execute "reversión del proceso emotivo que se había operado en la conciencia; es decir, volver de la emoción a la sensación, y de ésta a los agentes que la causaron" (103). Borges's rejection of superficial or "dermic" sensations recalls Macedonio's rejection of the culinary, and his insistence on distilling his poetry to the translation of pure emotions also bears substantial similarities with the Macedonian positions sketched here. These similarities, in turn, lead to two important points of contrast: first, the distinction between "poetry" in Borges and "literature" in Macedonio, which, as discussed above, is essentially prose writing. Second, Borges's refusal of "metaphysics" contrasts with the position eventually taken by Macedonio, in which emotional and metaphysical experiences are no longer thought to be mutually exclusive.

[60] From this perspective, Macedonio's rejection of novelistic realism can be re-stated. Realist novels seek the production of affective states of a peripheral nature through a perpetual proliferation of overheated frying pans and voluptuous chords. They use prose to provoke a cascade of sensuous experiences of pleasure, pain, and desire, maintaining the reader in a state of embodied, corporeal excitement by exploiting prose's capacity to generate peripheral stimulation. Macedonio's artistic prose, on the other hand, aims to *indirectly* conjure emotions by eliminating the sensorial and reducing prose to the purely intellectual sequencing of perceptions.

> Realidad es posible y justificable. Tus lágrimas de místico imposible de un amor sin pasado de no amor, dolor escondido del todoamor que en muchas mujeres aparece apenas y en ti va constante en cada momento, esas lágrimas son una demanda clamante que me dobla en un pensar que no alcanzo a igualar a tu Sentir, pues mis certezas de pensamiento, de futuro, no tienen respuesta para tu demanda de un no ser del pasado, para tu pedido del no haber sido antes de amar. Tus lágrimas son la Lágrima del pavor y afán de una existencia sin fin, de imposible cesación. (221).

This passage thematizes the turn away from the "culinary" that characterizes Macedonio's prose. By way of an initial metaphor of a cresting wave, the Presidente immediately abstracts away from Eterna's tears, passing into a philosophical reflection on love. Her tears are a demand that causes the Presidente to double back into thought. Beyond this thematization of the turn back into thought, the passage bears two of the key hallmarks of Macedonio's prose. First, the use of capital letters (here taken to hyperbolic lengths) elevates prose to the level of the conceptual and radically separates the conversation from the embodied experience of the woman whose tears provide its initial inspiration. This culminates in the distinction between the woman's tears and the "Tear" of the desire for an unlimited existence in time. Second, the syntax is characteristically complex, with proliferating subordinate clauses, inventive neologisms, and complex plays on negation and affirmation. Macedonio repeatedly insists on the necessity of complete concentration when reading, and often thematizes this necessity through discussions of readers whose inadequacy for his novel lies precisely in that they are unwilling to turn their backs on worldly concerns when they sit down to read. Piglia has described Macedonio's sentences in terms of a "microscopic" provocation of suspense in which the author re-

functionalizes techniques commonly used in serial novels to suspend action until the next episode, deploying them in a manner that is "atomizada y condensada al máximo y repetida varias veces en la misma página" ("Notas" 95). By making each sentence into a puzzle in language that the reader must slowly piece together on a cognitive level, he hopes to keep his reader engaged intellectually and attentive to the play of ideas as they weave through the written page.

The second passage offers a humorous account of the *Museo*'s relation to early-20th-century futurism:

> Esta novela que fue y será futurista hasta que se escriba, como lo es su autor, que hasta hoy no ha escrito página alguna futura y aun ha dejado para lo futuro el ser futurista en prueba de su entusiasmo por serlo efectivamente cuando antes—sin caer en la trampa de ser un futurista de en seguida como los que adoptaron el futurismo, en tiempo presente—y por eso se le ha declarado el novelista que tiene más porvenir, todo por hacer, apresuramiento genial suyo que nace de haber pensado que con el progreso de todas las velocidades la posteridad no se ha hecho contemporánea y ya está, para cada obra, en la última edición periodística del día de aparición. (44)

The prose employed by Macedonio is substantially similar to the first passage. It retains the syntactic complexity, conceptual play, and complicated processes of negation that requires the reader's complete attention in order to slowly unravel a series of conceptual jokes. This passage takes up many of the themes discussed in the second section of this chapter: the question of a "novela futurista" is framed in institutional terms, that is, in reference to the figure of the author, to his peers in the literary field, and to the mechanisms of publicity that consecrate novelists as

having the most (or brightest) future. The author's novel, like all unfinished works, is and will continue to be "futurist," and the author has managed to humorously outflank other so-called futurists by putting off his conversion to futurism until some future moment, and so on.

Against the backdrop of the formal similarities between the two passages—both can be taken as examples in practice of Macedonio's theory of prose—the distinction between the metaphysical ruminations on Eterna's tears and the humorous study of the circulation of futurism in the literary world, points toward one additional distinction that structures Macedonio's theory of prose: the distinction between "la Humorística Conceptual y la Prosa del Personaje o Novela" ("Para una teoría del arte" 247), which make up the two central subcategories of artistic prose.[61]

Both genres function by way of a core mechanism. Macedonio's humorism, which is described by Ana María Barrenechea as a "humorismo de la nada," exploits processes of determinate negation to elaborate a paradoxically concrete nothingness: "moviliz[ando] la nada contra la materia, cre[ando] una nada más real y más concreta que ella" (475). This concretion of nothingness aims at the rational framework of time, space, and causality through which human beings experience reality, and aspires to produce what Macedonio describes as "el instante de creencia en la racionalidad del absurdo" ("Para una teoría del arte" 248). The joke in the above passage about how the author's postponement of his conversion to futurism has led people to declare him the novelist with the most future—"todo por hacer"—is one such example. Rather than basing ideas considering a novelist's future on the presence of promising early texts that point toward bigger things to come, the joke absurdly proposes that the prize for most promising

[61] In truth, Macedonio identifies three genres of artistic prose, the third being "la Metáfora o Poesía" ("Para una teoría del arte" 247). The metaphor, which Macedonio defines as an "interjección conceptiva" ("Para una teoría del arte" 247), produces a surprising sentiment of likeness in the mind of the reader, who comes to "sentir lo que no había sentido en presencia de las cosas gracias a la semejanza hallada por el autor" ("Para una teoría del arte" 247). In general, Macedonio tends to minimize the importance of this third genre of prose in his writings on the theory of the novel.

novelist should go to the person whose works are completely and totally absent, or nonexistent.[62] The "Prosa del personaje," in contrast, exploits the metaphysical potentialities opened up by the interplay between the reader and the novelistic character. As described above, it troubles the reader's sense of being and produces a moment of cognitive breakdown. As Attala explains, both genres share an overarching anti-Cartesian tenor. They differ, however in that humor addresses the realm of *reason*, while novelistic prose addresses that of *being*: Macedonio's theory of prose thus bifurcates in terms of a dual critique of rationality and ontology.

Humoristic prose occupies a surprisingly central place in Macedonio's theory of artistic prose. However, it is precisely by way of this bifurcation between humoristic and novelistic prose, both of which are constitutive of artistic prose, that Macedonio harmonizes the dual impulses described in this chapter. For Macedonio, the novel humoristically partakes in an "avant-garde" tendency of critiquing the institutional framework that conditions literary production: the humor employed in the *Museo* aims primarily at disrupting the governing rationality of the literary institution, and it can thus be thought of as the central means through which Macedonio elaborates his project of institutional critique. The "prosa de personajes," on the other hand, such as the prose employed in the passage concerning Eterna's tears, allows him to elaborate an understanding of literature that can strategically utilize the novelistic character to

[62] Volume three of Macedonio's *Obras completas* contains his extended essay on humor, "Para una teoría de la humorística," which was also published in the 1944 edition of *Papeles de Recién venido y Continuación de la Nada*, although the text was omitted from the later 1967 edition. In that essay, Macedonio analyzes the theories of humor of Kant, Schopenhauer, Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson, and Sigmund Freud, among others. He differs from these theorists in that he believes they have failed to identify what he calls the "positive affective sign" that is essential to humor. When Bergson, for example, defines humor as "lo mecánico calcado sobre lo vivente" ("Para una teoría de la humorística" 262), or when Kant defines it as "una afección que nace de la reducción repentina a la nada de una intensa expectativa" ("Para una teoría de la humorística" 261), neither author recognizes that the essence of humor does not lie in the psychic mechanism that produces laughter, nor in laughter itself, but rather in the "signo afectivo de la causa de ese placer, la condición hedónica fundamental sin la cual ese placer no se produce" (*Obras completas* 3, 261).

trouble the reader's ontological certainties, and thus bring about the experience of reality as a self-less, universal sensibility.

It is essential that Macedonio conceives of both modalities of prose as purely intellectual in nature, and as completely shorn from the sensorial. His theory of humor, just as much as his theory of the novel, insists on this distinction: strictly speaking, for somebody to slip and fall on a banana peel is simply not humorous, according to the Macedonian theory. Both modalities exploit the way in which a certain type of writing can engage the reader in a purely mental flow of states such that, when a joke causes a momentary belief in the absurd, or when Don Quixote comes to doubt the reality of his existence as a person when faced with the reality of his existence as a character, the reading experience can culminate in breakdowns of the reader's rational and ontological frameworks. By grouping both types of prose within the category of artistic prose, Macedonio plausibly establishes that the ideal reader of his novel will at the same time partake in his humoristic critique of the literary institution *and* remain in the state of intellectual engagement that forms the prerequisite for the emotional state of cognitive breakdown.

Macedonio's early interventions into the literary field of 1920s Argentina largely took the form of humorous articles published in the avant-garde journals *Proa* and *Martín Fierro*. These articles, like the *Museo*, use humoristic prose as a vehicle for institutional critique, and they indicate that, at least from the beginning of his major projects of the 1920s, he had not only come to understand the institutional framework that had accrued around literature in Argentina as a problem, but had also begun to elaborate the sorts of strategies that might be able to address this situation. In the *Museo*, these humoristic strategies are wedded with a theory of the novel as a

"Prosa de Personajes," in which an extremization of the fictional status of the character causes the reader to momentarily glimpse a reality beyond selfhood.

CONCLUSION: MACEDONIO'S PARADOXICAL EMPLOTMENT OF AUTONOMY AND HETERONOMY

There are various manners of addressing the coexistence of the two programs for modern art outlined above. If Macedonio's life and work are conceived as a single project, of which the campaign for president, his humorous articles and toasts, and his idea of the "Novela Salida a la Calle," the overarching aspiration to reconnect art and life can be shown to predominate. However, in the context of his *Museo*, this chapter has argued that this drive is subsumed into a conception of the novel as an artistic medium that can produce, in the private act of reading, an alteration of the reader's consciousness. Rather than resolving these divergent impulses into a single, overarching tendency, this conclusion argues that the tension between the two is constitutive of the vision of art in modernity that takes shape in Macedonio's *Museo* and in his many other artistic and philosophical pursuits: the one cannot stand without the other.

The following pages first restate the vision of artistic modernity of Jacques Rancière, emphasizing the way in which he approaches 19th-and-20th-century art and literature in terms that largely reproduce the distinction between these two programs pursued by Macedonio. In a way that largely reproduces the dichotomy studied above in the works of Macedonio, Rancière highlights an important commonality between two opposed, yet complementary, sides of the "aesthetic revolution" of the 18th and 19th centuries. After synthesizing Rancière's positions, I then turn to Ana Camblong's study of the Macedonian use of paradoxes, proposing, with Camblong, that his vision of art's fate in modernity is fundamentally paradoxical in nature. Unlike Rancière, who in *Aesthesis* identifies the dream of building bridges between art and life

as the single guiding principle of artistic modernity, Macedonio maintains the two poles in perpetual tension.

In an article published in *New Left Review* in 2002 titled "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," Jacques Rancière proposes a reshuffling of the divergent histories or "plots" of modern art. Rancière argues that art in modernity is characterized by competing emplotments of two concepts: autonomy, and its opposite, heteronomy. For Rancière, autonomy references the distinction between two modes of experience, the aesthetic and the everyday, a distinction that had begun to occupy a central place in aesthetic theory beginning in the 18th century. In the writings of aesthetic philosophers such as Alexander Baumgarten and Friedrich Schiller, the aesthetic experience of the spectator when viewing a work of art is conceptualized as qualitatively distinct from normal, everyday experience. Heteronomy, on the other hand, refers to collapse of this distinction. Rancière proposes that, in modern theories of art, the autonomy of the aesthetic as a mode of experience that occurs when viewing a work of art is *necessarily* complemented by moments of radical heteronomy in which aesthetic experience overflows into visions of a world redeemed by and through art.

To illustrate this necessary relation between autonomy and heteronomy, Rancière highlights a paradox voiced by Schiller in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*. When describing his experience upon viewing a Greek statue known as the Juno Ludovisi, Schiller "states a paradox and makes a promise. He declares that 'Man is only completely human when he plays,' and assures us that this paradox is capable 'of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful and of the still more difficult art of living'" ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 133). Schiller, who describes aesthetic experience in terms of the "play" or harmonization of competing sensuous and rational/formalist drives that characterize human behavior, emphasizes

that this experience points in two directions at once: toward the construction of a progressively more perfect world or "edifice" of art, *and* toward the perfection of the life of a community that, through art, learns important lessons about the "art of living."

For Rancière, this bifurcation is constitutive of the project of modern art. On the one hand, many artists and philosophers have proposed means of resolving the Schillerian paradox, such as the full-scale sublation of art into life dreamed of by many avant-garde movements, or, conversely, Hegel's sublation of art into the dialectical movement of the world-spirit. Others, concerned that the resolution of the paradox would lead to an impoverishing homogenization of experience, seek to find ways of preserving the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experience. From this perspective, the project of modern art has to do with saving what Rancière calls "the 'heterogeneous sensible'" ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 143), that is, the possibility of a point of heterogeneity with respect to everyday experience, which thinkers such as Schiller associated specifically with the viewer's contact with the work of art. This, for Rancière, constitutes the dominant perspective on art in modernity. Rancière identifies two competing endeavors to preserve the heterogeneous sensible, each grounded in a particular emplotment of autonomy and heteronomy, that emerge as the project of modern art takes shape over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Anticipating the ideas proposed in the following paragraphs, I argue that these two plots coexist in Macedonio's approach to the novel, and that it is the very tension between the two that guides his literary project.

The first plot, which for Rancière begins in early-19th-century Romantic poetics, emphasizes the permeability of the line separating art and life, and is driven by a dynamic that is substantially similar to Bürger's discussion of the avant-gardes' incorporation of "reality fragments" into the work of art. For Rancière, the writings of Friedrich Schlegel and other early

Romantics inaugurate a new relation between the work of art, the art of the past, and everyday life: past works, as well as the everyday objects of the bourgeois life-world, are now viewed in terms of a temporal structure of latency and re-activation. All things existing in the present, and all elements of past art, are conceived to possess a potential aestheticity that allows them to cross over into the work of art from the experiential realm of the everyday.[63] Rancière highlights an episode from Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* as a primal scene of this perpetual dialectic of de-and re-aestheticization. When the novel's hero enters an antique shop filled with old statues, furniture, and miscellaneous goods, Balzac writes that "this ocean of furnishings, inventions, works of art and relics made for him an endless poem" ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 144). This understanding of the latent poeticity of all things is repeated in the meticulous realist descriptions of Émile Zola, as well as in surrealist collages, the *Arcades Project* of Walter Benjamin, and later tendencies in Pop Art. In each case, the aesthetic and the everyday exchange qualities. Importantly, Rancière identifies an entropic tendency toward absolute heteronomy on the interior of this plot, highlighting the perpetual possibility that this border-crossing could permanently erase the border between life and art in a world where "nothing, however prosaic, escapes the domain of art" ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 146). In this scenario, the distinction between the aesthetic and the everyday, which structures the Romantic poetics of latency and re-activation, would culminate in the eternal reduplication of the same in a life-become-art.

The second plot takes the exact opposite shape of the first: rather than exploiting the permeability of the border between art and life, it argues for the extreme separation of the two

[63] This process bears certain similarities to Bürger's discussion of the allegorical procedures of the avant-garde; however, while Bürger stresses how these procedures tend to collapse the distinction between life and art in works that do not represent reality, but rather *are* reality, Rancière comes to the exact opposite conclusion: the fact that any and every thing can pass from one side to the other, from life to art and back again, ultimately *preserves* the distinction between everyday and aesthetic modes of experience.

realms in a process that is characteristic of 20th-century denunciations of kitsch and commercial art, as well as theories that emphasize dehumanization (Ortega), medium-specificity (Greenberg), or autonomy (Adorno). While these theories are often accused of seeking an aestheticist escape from social existence in their privileging of formal experimentation, Rancière insists that many of the most "formalist" works of art, which apparently aim to completely seclude themselves away from the world and dedicate themselves to the perfection of the "whole edifice of the art of the beautiful," *also* aspire to connect with life and produce changes in what Rancière calls "the still more difficult art of living." Citing the novels of Gustave Flaubert, as well as Adorno's aesthetic theory, Rancière proposes that they index a broader tendency in which modern art, in pursuit of autonomy, finds itself instead increasingly bound by a double heteronomy. On the one hand, the activities of artists who pursue increasing formal or technical perfection progressively dissolve into the ruling dynamic of a modern society that embraces technological change and the perpetual pursuit of novelty. On the other, art insists that despite its uncomfortable proximity to processes of capitalist reproduction, it is nonetheless capable of granting access to a realm of experience existing *beyond* the machinations of capitalist society. Adorno's reading of Schoenberg exemplifies this double movement:

> [I]n order to denounce the capitalist division of labour and the adornments of commodification, [Schoenberg's music] has to take that division of labour yet further, to be still more technical, more 'inhuman' than the products of capitalist mass production. But this inhumanity, in turn, makes the blotch of what has been repressed appear and disrupt the perfect technical arrangement of the work. ("The Aesthetic Revolution" 147)

In a first moment, autonomy becomes indistinguishable from heteronomy in the artist's pursuit of an absolute technique: this technique, at the extreme, becomes indistinguishable from the most advanced techniques of capitalist production. In a second moment, however, this hypostatization of technique is underwritten by the hope that the work of art might ultimately produce a vision of a world beyond what Adorno would call an increasingly administered society, and which Macedonio would conceive in terms of "maximalism" or the inflation of the state.

My reading of Macedonio's decades-long literary project has endeavored to illustrate the ways in which works such as the *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* are ultimately irreducible to one or the other of these two plots: if his project can be read in the tradition of what Rancière considers as Romantic poetics, it also demonstrates important affinities with the perspectives of thinkers such as Greenberg and Adorno, which hinge on the rigidification of the distinction between art and life. To conclude, I would like to propose that Macedonio's treatment of these two plots can ultimately be understood through recourse to the figure of the paradox. Rather than electing one plot or the other, Macedonio chooses both, and situates them in a paradoxical relationship.

Already in the "Otra lectura del texto" that accompanies the 1993 critical edition of the *Museo*, Camblong asks "¿por qué los procedimientos paradójicos hegemonizan los discursos macedonianos?" ("Otra lectura" 446). A decade later, her monograph *Macedonio: Retórica y política de los discursos paradójicos* seeks to respond to this question, reading Macedonio's textual corpus (including extensive unpublished material from his archive) as a "discursive universe" that is structured by what she calls a "retórica paradójica" (*Macedonio* 16). She conceives the word "rhetoric" in broad terms as "una ingeniería completa de recursos, técnicas, estrategías, modelizaciones, usos, etc., plasmada en la materialidad de la escritura y en la

productividad semiótica del discurso" (16). From this standpoint, the paradox assumes a central importance as an "aparato de pensamiento" (116) that, by leading the author's thought processes to perpetual impasses, causes one to question both the overarching legal and normative frameworks of social existence (as in the related term *antinomy*, or "against the *nomos* or law"), as well as one's assumptions, opinions, or common-sense view of the world (*paradox* as "against the *doxa* or assumed truth").[64] She recurs to Gilles Deleuze's definition of paradox to explain its status in Macedonio's writing. For Deleuze, "[l]as paradojas son 'la pasión del pensamiento' que descubre lo que sólo puede ser pensado, lo que sólo puede ser hablado, que es también lo inefable y lo impensable" (Deleuze, qtd. in Camblong, *Macedonio* 70). As she explains, this understanding of the paradox also defines Macedonio's practice of writing:

> Esta cita [de Deleuze] que escande nuestra investigación pone el acento en la clave de la lectura que hacemos de los discursos macedonianos en el campo intelectual argentino: operador activo de proyectos. Macedonio: un *pensador apasionado* que no deja de ensayar en su escritura una manera de transformar el mundo, una fuente de la que se siguen nutriendo lecturas y programas de intelectuales y escritores. (*Macedonio* 70-71)

As the central apparatus of Macedonio's thought, the paradox presents itself at every turn in his discursive universe: "[l]a pasión paradójica de las prácticas macedonianas consiste en inventar, diseñar, armar, transformar y dejar instaladas un sinnúmero de máquinas paradójicas que

[64] Camblong situates Macedonio in a tradition, dating back to the pre-Socratics, of "autores que actúan la paradoja, que la utilizan como arma y la corporizan en la factura del discurso mismo" (*Macedonio* 16). While she explains that in western philosophy discussions of paradox have often migrated to the territory of rhetoric, where it becomes a largely oratorical (rather than logical) device, Macedonio remains squarely in the tradition that begins with the Eleatics and the Stoics, for whom the logical contradictions produced by paradoxes flow into a vision of being as, paradoxically, continuity amidst constant change. For these thinkers, rather than a sort of oratorical cheap trick used to provoke wonder and confusion amongst one's audience, the paradox implies the "[subversión de] la *base y fundamento* de la *vida humana*" (*Macedonio* 108, emphasis in original).

continúan operando en un proceso de efectos infinitos" (*Macedonio* 121). Camblong's Deleuzian vision of Macedonio's textual corpus presents it as a vast array of experimental machines in which the paradox, rather than leading to an impasse, instead has a constructive, multiplying effect, producing moments of passion that in turn lead to additional bifurcations and transformations within a project that perpetually arrives at new barriers, then, just as perpetually, brings them crashing down.

In paradoxical contrast to Camblong's understanding of Macedonio's practice of writing, in which "la *expansión* [forma] el mecanismo privilegiado de la producción del texto" (Estudio preliminar lxx; emphasis in original), this chapter has also sought to mark a series of un-trespassed limits that characterize Macedonio's theory of the novel: the private realm as the scene of reading, the rigorous limitation of the novel within the greater system of artistic mediums, the character as the *sine qua non* of the novel, and the limitation of artistic prose to exclude any aspiration to sensuosity. Setting these tendencies against one another, one might describe the *Museo* in terms of the following paradox: the novel must expand outward "into the street," breaking down institutional barriers and revolutionizing civic life; but in order for this to be successful, it must *also* revolutionize the reader's consciousness by establishing clear boundaries, retreating inward, redoubling its reliance on its innermost qualities as an artistic medium and returning to its place in the private scene of reading.

Camblong situates the first side of this paradox in a Deleuzian framework. She doesn't ignore certain conservative tendencies evident in Macedonio's textual corpus, such as his distaste for obscenity, his reliance on a model of friendly conversation ingrained in elite *criollo* culture, and his tendency to reproduce traditional gender roles, among others. In general, she recognizes their impact on his writing by signaling *reticence* as another "engranaje pluridimensional y

hegemónico que va ajustando la semiosis macedoniana en todas sus prácticas" (*Macedonio* 38). However, she separates this conservative streak from her overarching discussion of the Macedonian paradox, conceiving it instead as indicative of the author's historically and socially-grounded ideological horizon.

This chapter addresses a series of elements of Macedonio's novel that could likewise fall into this category: his reticence to intermix what Bürger would call "reality fragments" into the work of art, his hesitation to blur the line between the novel and the other arts, and his refusal to acknowledge any possible connection between aesthetic and sensual pleasure. Rather than positioning them as regressive tendencies connected to the author's ideological horizon, however, I argue that these are constitutive of his paradoxical approach to modern art.

For Macedonio, the border between life and art is paradoxically rigid *and* porous. Art can flow outward into life and produce changes in public life, but it also must seclude itself away from that very life in order to produce the effect of disidentification around which his aesthetics revolves, and in doing so change the private, "conscientiel" life of the reader.

Chapter 2: Cinema and Simulation in the Novels of Roberto Arlt

The previous chapter highlighted the manner in which, in the works of Macedonio Fernández, the relationship between art and life can be conceived as a one-way street. While in his *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* (as well as in a number of his other projects from the 1920s), art flows freely into the streets and conquers the city of Buenos Aires, his poetics of the novel is ultimately grounded in the strict seclusion of art from life: nothing taken from the realm of everyday life can cross over into the pages of the novel. Moreover, Macedonio maintains an equally strict insistence on preserving a hierarchical separation of artistic mediums, based on the understanding that the power that each fine art exercises over its recipient is tied to its capacity to remain within its respective domain of competence; as Macedonio himself puts it, "[c]uanto más arte diferente se combina menor es su poder" ("Para una teoría de la novela" 255). The novel, and each of the other artistic mediums, must be kept separate from each other, and from the influence of any and all elements taken from the domain of life.

Turning now to the novels of Roberto Arlt, one is struck by how little these tenets concerning the seclusion of art from life, and from the other arts, seem to apply. In Arlt, all of the stuff of life, from the individuals he encounters on the streets of Buenos Aires to the myriad phenomena of urban life in 1920s Buenos Aires, are freely granted a place in the pages of his novels. Moreover, he draws just as freely from other artistic mediums, such as popular serial novels, naturalist theater, and, notably, early Hollywood cinema. Macedonio is concerned with preserving the separation of art from life by way of a radically anti-realist poetics of the novel ("o el arte está demás, o nada tiene que ver con la realidad," qtd. in Del Barco 469), while Arlt develops compositional practices based on a principle of equal admissibility of anything and

everything into the pages of his novels. And, if for Macedonio only the hardening of the boundary separating art from life can ultimately lead to the fleeting experience of contact with a pre-individual domain of existence in which the reader's sense of self dissolves into a reality conceived as a singular, universal sensibility, then Arlt appears to be concerned with establishing the essentially permeable nature of the boundary between art and life. For Macedonio, art only reconnects with life on the rarest of occasions; For Arlt, on the other hand, life can freely and repeatedly reconnect with art, as can the representational techniques gleaned from other arts. Each page of novels stages these border crossings, in a process similar to that discussed by Rancière under the heading of Romantic poetics. The stuff of urban life possesses a latent aesthetic quality, and the novelist activates this aestheticity as he composes his works.

What this chapter aims to demonstrate is that Arlt's poetics of the novel does not result in an attitude of "anything goes" in which the border separating art from life is effaced or made functionally meaningless. Rather, he too conceives the relationship between art and life as a one-way street, where all the elements of life can flow into the realm of art, but only on the condition that the elements of art are not utilized to alter or aestheticize one's everyday life. Unlike Macedonio, for Arlt the novel can freely make use of any and all materials, artistic and non-artistic, drawn from outside of its traditional sphere of competence. However, while these materials can (and should) be productively put to use by the novelist, under no circumstance should they be appropriated and put to use by normal people in their everyday lives: Arlt, in a manner similar to 19th century novelists such as Gustave Flaubert and Eça de Queirós, condemns the tendencies that he observes in the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, who read serial novels and flock to movie theaters in search of procedures for achieving their desires and triumphing in a social world that Arlt frequently views as a social-Darwinist "struggle for life." In the hundreds

of daily columns he wrote for the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo*, as well as in his four novels and diverse short fictions, Arlt develops this dichotomy between the artist, who knows how to make the myriad phenomena of urban life flow into the modern novel, and a general public that aspires to make art flow back into an aestheticized everyday life.

This chapter focuses on one specific aspect of this dynamic, positioning his novels' inter-medial treatment of cinema as a privileged standpoint from which to study Arlt's broader understanding of how art should, and should not, relate to life. Arlt published four novels between 1926 and 1932, years during which the spectacular success of Hollywood movies starring Rudolph Valentino, Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, and other early film stars forged cinema's place as a prominent cultural form in Arlt's home city of Buenos Aires. His novels formulate an ambivalent response to cinema's emergent popularity. On the one hand, Arlt endeavors to extend cinema's innovative means of visual representation to the textual medium of narrative fiction. On the other hand, his novels investigate the ideological effects of cinema viewership through character studies that trace a multi-faceted process cinematic bovarism that, for him, characterizes the reception of popular Hollywood films by mass audiences in Argentina. If the heroine of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) famously addresses her chronic dissatisfaction with life by reading popular serial melodramas and seeking to actively make her experiences conform to the tales of love and romance narrated in their pages, Arlt sees that in 1920s Buenos Aires, the men and women who flock to the city's movie houses by the hundreds of thousands follow in her footsteps, seeking to imitate the behaviors of the decade's popular film stars, and actively manipulating their lives to make them unfold like the stories they have

viewed on movie screens.[65] While Arlt was an avid moviegoer and regularly wrote about cinema during his career as a daily columnist for the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo*, he did not articulate a coherent theoretical standpoint regarding how the artistic mediums of literature and cinema relate to one another. In this chapter I argue that Arlt's novels immanently develop such a theory by juxtaposing two manners of utilizing cinema, one of which is valued positively, the other of which is implicitly condemned. The writer's way of doing so, elaborated over the course of Arlt's four novels, relies on the inter-medial translation of representational techniques from cinema to literature; his characters' way of doing so, on the other hand, involves a Bovaryesque aestheticization (or "cinematization") of everyday life in which they attempt to fashion their lives to resemble the lives represented on movie screens.

Existing criticism has tended to privilege one side or the other of this bifurcated perspective. On the one hand, scholars in recent decades have asked how Arlt's contact with cinematic representation translates to a prose style that possesses, as Francine Masiello puts it, "el estilo visual de Hollywood, con su brillo de celuloide transformada en página impresa" (212). The question of how Arlt's prose captures the visual style of cinema has been addressed, among others, by Beatriz Sarlo, who in *La imaginación técnica* studies the technical imagination deployed in Arlt's novels, as well as in a recent monograph by Gersende Camenen titled *Roberto*

[65] The term "Bovarism" is consolidated in the late-nineteenth-century French reception of *Madame Bovary,* in works such as Jules Gaultier's *Le Bovarysme: La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert* (1892) and Georges Palante's *Le Bovarysme: Une moderne philosophie de l'illusion* (1903). While the content of Arlt's cinematic Bovarism will be expanded on throughout this chapter, a brief mention of the current dictionary definition will help illustrate the basic mechanism. *Merriam-Webster* defines bovarism as "a conception of oneself as other than one is to the extent that one's behavior is conditioned or dominated by the conception," adding, in a sub-definition, "*especially*: domination by such an idealized, glamorized, glorified, or otherwise unreal conception of oneself that it results in dramatic personal conflict (as in tragedy), in markedly unusual behavior (as in paranoia), or in great achievement" ("Bovarism"). As the foregoing analysis of Arlt's novels will show, the link between bovarism and "great achievement" is of particular significance in works that repeatedly dramatize the ascendancy of characters whose capacity to actively manipulate their lives in accordance with the glamorous subjects of Hollywood film brings them success and personal triumph.

Arlt: Écrire au temps de l'image, which studies Arlt's novels' relation to a modern culture defined by the triumph of the image. On the other hand, multiple scholars have studied Arlt's vision of the ideological effects of cinema. Ricardo Piglia associates cinema with Arlt's "crítica muy frontal de … lo que podríamos llamar la producción imaginaria de masas" (*Crítica y ficción* 25), and Rita Gnutzmann describes a basic mechanism through which Arlt's characters use cinema to fill a lack in their own life experiences by vulgarly re-creating film stars' behaviors, gestures, and language: "[sus personajes] son seres huecos y estériles … [que] llenan su *carencia* con modelos alienantes … que para ellos representan el máximo de belleza y elegancia (Greta Garbo) o de pasión y sensualidad … como Rodolfo Valentino" (80). Valeria de los Ríos, finally, encounters the seeds of a revolutionary, post-auratic potential of cinema in Arlt's journalistic studies of film spectatorship.

This chapter synthesizes these two trends by setting the writer's cinematic prose style in dialogue with his characters' cinematic illusions. After an initial study of Arlt's treatment of cinema in his newspaper columns, the second and third sections address these two sides of his treatment of cinema. The fourth and final section seeks to ascertain the relationship between the two by drawing on a series of readings of the novels of Flaubert by Rancière, who encounters a similar conflict between writer and character at the heart of Flaubert's literary project. Using Rancière's study of the literary and political background of Flaubert's treatment of bovarism in his most famous novel as a blueprint, I ultimately argue that Arlt's dual treatment of cinema can be understood in terms of a concept of simulation derived both from the sociological literature of Arlt's time, as well as from Laura Juárez and Horacio González's recent studies of simulation in Arlt's works of theater. Arlt's novels manifest a deep unease regarding viewers' tendencies to simulate gestures and behaviors learned on screen as a means for attaining their desires. He

implicitly contrasts this purportedly pernicious mode of simulation to an alternate understanding of *artistic* simulation that is also present in Ingenieros's work: while the artists that Ingenieros calls "simuladores profesionales" (129) also simulate the language, movements, and behaviors of others, they do so with aesthetic, rather than practical, goals, and are thus exempt from the generally negative view of simulation espoused by the sociologist. While, as González emphasizes, Arlt tends to situate simulation, rather than authenticity, as the ultimate horizon of modern social existence, it will be argued here that it is this distinction between different modalities of simulation (non-artistic and artistic) that underwrites his project of writing novels during what Camenen describes in the title of her book as the "time of the image."

Ambivalent Enchantments: The Argentine Novelist in the Age of Cinema

While questions concerning the relationship between literature and cinema date back to the initial years of the 20th century, recent decades have witnessed increased scholarly interest in inter-medial relations between the two art forms. Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz, building on the pioneering work of Friedrich Kittler, propose that the literary production of the late-19th and early-20th centuries is characterized by a changing media ecology where "writing and written narrative were displaced from their erstwhile centrality and forced to compete with gramophones, kinetoscopes, and their technologically more advanced successors in the marketplace of inscription" (4). If in previous centuries print media exerted a relative hegemony over other forms of inscribing sensory data, in the differentiated media landscape of the 20th century, print media loses its dominance as literary texts necessarily began to enter into increasingly complex dialogues with other media forms. John Johnston describes this process in terms of *mediality*, a term which references "the ways in which a literary text inscribes in its own

language the effects produced by other media." (175). Rather than treat the literary text as a product of an inter-textual or inter-discursive relation with various literary traditions, discursive contexts, or potential literary fields (local, national, regional, global), these and other scholars conceive of literature first and foremost as a means of materially inscribing reality. They investigate the way in which literary inscriptions, their material base (printed language), and the technologies used to produce them (the typewriter, for example) compete with, and interact with, those of other media such as film.

The following pages read Arlt's novels in this context, arguing that the author's critical dialogue with cinema, and his exploration of the inter-medial possibilities created for literature by the new cinematic art, constitute one of the most significant and far-reaching aspects of his literary project. Due to his professional status as both a novelist and one of Argentina's most famous newspaper columnists (his popular daily column appeared in *El Mundo,* Argentina's first modern, tabloid-style newspaper), Arlt was uniquely positioned to reflect on the major shifts in what Tabbi and Wutz call the "marketplace of inscription." As Fernando Rosenberg puts it, Arlt "perceived as no one else did a shift in the distribution and consumption of cultural production, a shift that implied a radical change in modern subjectivity" (71). While this shift is not solely reducible to the emergence of cinema (the new "seventh art" in Riciotto Canudo's famous formulation) the spectacular growth of the film industry over the first three decades of the 20th century make it perhaps the most significant element (and certainly the most visible one) of the new media ecology within which Arlt produces his novels.

The years in which Arlt wrote his novels were characterized by a dramatic expansion of film spectatorship in Argentina: there were about one thousand movie projectors spread throughout the country by the early 1930s (Buenos Aires alone possessed more than 200 movie

theaters), and this boom in movie houses was widely understood as a central component of the city's modernization.[66] The sensational emergence of cinema, in Argentina and throughout the Hispanic world, was a major concern for most writers of Arlt's generation. As Guillermo de Torre puts it in his influential 1925 book *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia*, "[e]l cinema proyecta sus angulares rayos luminosos, sus imágenes palpitantes y su vital ritmo acelerador sobre nuestras letras de vanguardia" (326). Writers were intrigued by the manner in which film technology expanded the perceptual capacities of the human eye, producing new, thrilling ways of registering diverse aspects of reality. Furthermore, as cinema consolidated its place as a narrative art form, filmmakers developed new methods of storytelling, such as techniques of montage used to edit series of distinct shots into sequences in order to produce meaning or suggest the passage of time, which were later exploited by writers in search of techniques that could also be utilized in the textual medium.[67] To cite just one prominent example, Jorge Luis Borges's fascination with Joseph von Sternberg's films led him employ montage-like techniques of narration in *Evaristo Carriego* and the short texts that make up *Historia universal de infamia*.[68] As Edmundo Paz-Soldán and Debra A. Castillo explain, Latin American writers such

[66] For information about the growth of cinema in Latin America in the early 20th century, see John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America*. Regarding the importance of cinema in the modernization of Buenos Aires, Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz offers the following vision of the awakening of a newly modern Buenos Aires during the initial decades of the 20th century: "La ciudad reconquistó el río, trazó avenidas en sus veriles, habilitó balnearios en las playas. Las orillas se poblaron de bañistas sin remilgos. Una camaradería sin cortapisas se traba entre los sexos. Las familias volvieron a propiciar los paseos. Las instituciones deportivas permitieron el acceso de mujeres, hasta entonces interdicto. El automóvil fue incitación de los excursionistas. Las autoridades abrieron caminos, pavimentaron algunas salidas al campo y se adscribieron a su mantenimiento. El Delta se pobló de restaurantes. *Los cinematógrafos se multiplicaron por arte de birlibirloque. En un santiamén, se abrieron cerca de mil salas para exhibir películas*. Se levantó la proscripción al baile, que, como cristiano en catacumba, pasó escondido en algún cabaret o en el vestíbulo de algún club. Ahora se baila en todos lados..." (54; emphasis mine).

[67] See Andrew Shail's *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* for a detailed consideration of how, during the second decade of the 20th century, "the basic unit of cinema [came to be understood as] a narrative rather than a reel of film" (30).

[68] See Edgardo Cozarinsky's foundational essay "Magias parciales del relato" for an in-depth analysis of Borges's uses of cinema in his early fictions. As Cozarinsky explains, Borges wants to avoid the proliferation of descriptive detail that characterizes the novel as a literary form: in the late-1920s and early-1930s, he is interested in encountering techniques that would avoid descriptive excesses and focus instead on the presentation of particularly intense, connotative scenes that would be able to condense large amounts of historical documentation into images

as Borges, Vicente Huidobro, and Arlt form part of a broader tendency in which, during the early decades of the 20th century, "[b]oth literary form and thematics slowly began to open themselves out upon these new modes of representing reality" (6) as writers began to incorporate the new cinematic medium "in the heart of their works, reaching for a cinematic style of perceiving modern life" (6).

Importantly, however, this productive interaction with cinema was often accompanied by deep concerns regarding cinema's ascendancy among mass audiences who, it was believed, were experiencing cinema in inappropriate and even dangerous ways. Argentine poet and essayist Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, whose stance on cinema shares important affinities with Arlt's, asserts in his 1931 essay *El hombre que está solo y espera* that "[e]l cine norteamericano es … un estupefaciente tan poderoso como el opio o la morfina. Es un sustituto de la vida en que el uso de la vida se relaja" (141). For Scalabrini, Hollywood cinema constitutes "el mayor enemigo del espíritu porteño" (141) due to its corrupting effect on the Buenos Aires viewing public. The following pages will periodically return to Scalabrini's condemnation of cinema, which is here taken to index a broader anxiety among writers and intellectuals of Arlt's generation regarding the fact that, despite the undeniable aesthetic value of certain films, the film industry *also* seemed to be exercising a negative and corrupting influence on mass audiences who went to the movies seeking fantasy, enjoyment, and a facile escape from their everyday lives.

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capable of communicating the whole without enumerating its many facets or details. He finds such techniques, among other places, in the films of Josef von Sternberg, "hechas … de significativos momentos" (17), and, often making explicit reference to cinema, he attempts to extend these techniques to his own literary practices. In many ways, Borges's uses of cinema are exactly inverse to those of Arlt: Borges seeks means of *condensing* detail into connotative images, while Arlt, as will be discussed below, aims to *faithfully register*, and thus preserve, the manifold details that characterize the experience of city life.

Arlt's journalistic writings on cinema participate in this ambivalent attitude.[69] On the one hand, he is captivated by the marvelous artistry of actors and directors such as Emil Jannings and Charlie Chaplin. Commenting in a 1929 column on Emil Jannings's performance in the film *Betrayal*, he asserts that the film is of great interest due to the lead actor's talent for revealing a full range of human emotions through minute alterations in his facial expression: "[i]nconsciencia. Locura. Lujuria. Gula. Terror. Libidinosidad. Ferocidad. Espanto. Coraje. Astucia. ¿Qué es, en síntesis, la película? Todos los estados de un desequilibrado revelados por el trabajo muscular de su semblante" ("Viendo actuar" 51).[70] Arlt also praises the "valor estético, altísimo" of the closing scene of Chaplin's *City Lights*, highlighting how the film weaves together a series of minute details in order to create a work of art in which "todos los gestos, miradas, expresiones, detalles, son de una delicadeza purísima … [y] adquieren el carácter de una sinfonía espiritual. Es como si fuera posible componer música con juegos de

[69] Most of Arlt's journalistic writings on cinema are compiled in the 1997 volume *Notas sobre el cinematógrafo*. For a basic introduction to Arlt's treatment of cinema, see Jorge B. Rivera's prologue to that volume. For other recent analyses of Arlt's discussions of cinema in his columns, see de los Ríos, "El cine y la invención de la vida moderna en las crónicas de Roberto Arlt," and Camenen, *Roberto Arlt: Écrire au temps de l'image*, pp. 75-108.

[70] The intense effect that close-ups of the human face produced in early film audiences is well known, and is commented on at length in Béla Balázs's *Visible Man or the Culture of Film*, as well as in Roland Barthes' short essay "The Face of Garbo." While this topic exceeds the scope of the below reading of Arlt's cinematographic techniques, it bears mentioning that Arlt's novels also demonstrate an intense interest in how facial expressions can be used as a means of revealing human emotions. The following scene from *Los siete locos*, which was published less than a month before Arlt wrote his column on *Betrayal*, is emblematic of this interest in the human visage. Augusto "Remo" Erdosain, the novel's protagonist, is sitting alone at home. His wife has just left him for another man, when her cousin, Gregorio Barsut, shows up at his doorstep. He asks Erdosain if Elsa has stepped out of the house. Erdosain responds that she has left him. It is easy to imagine that the following paragraphs, which elaborate a dialogue based almost exclusively on the two men's shifting facial expressions, were written under the influence of films such as *Betrayal*:

> "Barsut enderezó la cabeza, sus cejas se levantaron para dejar entrar más luz a los párpados, y con los labios ligeramente entreabiertos, sopló:
>
> '¿Se fue?'
>
> Erdosain arrugó el ceño, examinó al soslayo los zapatos del otro, y entrecerrando los párpados, espiando con esa mirada filtrada a través de las pestañas la angustia de Barsut, dejó caer lentamente:
>
> 'Sí… se… fue… con… un… hombre…'
>
> Y guiñando el párpado izquierdo como el Rufián Melancólico, inclinó la cabeza, levantando la piel de la frente mientras el otro ojo desmesuradamente parecía burlarse de Barsut. Abollando con el mentón la tiesura del cuello, éste agachó poderosamente la cabeza. Bajo la bronceada raya de sus cejas, fieramente aguardaban sus pupilas" (*Obras I*: 214).

luces y sombras" ("Final" 78). In these and other analyses of cinema, Arlt repeatedly champions a cinematic artistry grounded in film's capacity to weave elaborate tapestries of lights, shadows, glances and gestures.

On the other hand, he is apprehensive about the way that cinema's emergence is influencing the masses. He notes how the young men and women of Buenos Aires unrealistically dream of making it big as film stars: they incessantly compare themselves in the mirror to Rudolph Valentino and Greta Garbo, they absurdly assume film star personae in their everyday lives, and they flock in droves to sham acting academies that claim to provide the necessary training for them to make their dreams a reality. He furthermore believes that the general public is basically incapable of perceiving cinema's aesthetic value. Viewers instead prefer to identify with the human dramas represented on screen, "viv[iendo] en su sensibilidad un trozo de existencia de los personajes de sombra que gozan o sufren" ("Roberto Arlt" 20). At times, such as in the following quote from a 1936 review of an Emil Jannings film, Arlt explicitly contrasts the masses' interest in a film's "human" content to the writer's interest in its aesthetic value, clearly differentiating between two modalities of film spectatorship:

> Los aficionados a la técnica de la expresión humana, al gesto preciso, al tirabuzón que arranca del fondo de la bajeza humana grandes trozos de corcho de estupidez y maldad fofa, encontrarán en *Soy culpable* una obra de arte. El público, que muchas veces suele pasar por alto la filigrana para ir al bulto de la tragedia, asiste sorprendido al desenvolvimiento del film, porque las causas que determinan el drama no guardan absolutamente ninguna relación con nuestra educación ni nuestra sensibilidad. ("Roberto Arlt" 22)

This contrast between the aficionado who perceives the artful precision of the actor's gestures (the *form* in which he uses his face and body to express humanity's deepest truths) and the public, who superficially fixate on the film's dramatic *content*, marks the two poles of Arlt's bifurcated treatment of cinema in his novels.[71] It is important to note that this distinction is not a fixed or stable one. De los Ríos emphasizes that Arlt constitutes himself as a writer and as a film spectator "que se identifica y a la vez se distancia de un público masivo" (465), and her article, by maintaining a relative emphasis on Arlt's identification with Argentine mass audiences, shows how he is able to glimpse revolutionary potentialities in the new cinematic medium. The following pages, by preserving the distance that Arlt regularly marks between connoisseur (himself) and spectator (the masses) in his studies of film spectatorship, illustrate how Arlt elaborates a negative understanding of cinema's effect on the minds of all those who flock to the theatres of Buenos Aires, while still maintaining the privilege of the artist to perceive, and make proper use of, the technically-revolutionary elements of film.

CINEMA'S PLACE IN ARLT'S NOVELS: LITERATURE AND THE CINEMATIC WAY OF SEEING

In the opening chapter of *Una modernidad periférica*, Beatriz Sarlo explains how one of Arlt's newspaper columns, "Corrientes por la noche," communicates the unprecedented velocity of life in a city where electric cables criss-cross streets previously lit by gas lamps, neon lights

[71] This basic dichotomy, which Arlt employs throughout his journalistic writings on cinema, is formally identical to the distinction made by José Ortega y Gasset in *La deshumanización del arte* between a mass public who only enjoys a drama "cuando ha conseguido interesarse en los destinos humanos que le son propuestos" (21), and a minority of artists and intellectuals capable of participating in what he calls "el goce estético" (21) by abstracting away from the human content and contemplating the formal or "artistic" qualities of a given work. It matters little whether Arlt was familiar with Ortega y Gasset's essay. The essential point is that, against a certain tendency to view Arlt as an iconoclastic destructor of elitist aesthetic ideologies (Ricardo Piglia's "Roberto Arlt: una crítica de la economía literaria" is a paradigmatic example of this tendency), his writings on cinema consistently privilege a mode of experiencing cinema that is precisely *not* that of the general public. This paper argues that he transfers this dichotomous understanding of cinema spectatorship into the very form of his novels.

illuminate the silhouettes of passers-by, and modern mass transit traces ever-expanding routes outward from the city center. For Sarlo, Arlt participates in the transformation of Buenos Aires by developing new means of depicting urban life that draw not only on everyday experiences, but also on the new cultural forms that circulate in the modern city: "[la] forma moderna de la percepción [desplegada en las novelas de Arlt], incorpora también al cine" (59, footnote). A chapter from Arlt's third novel, *Los lanzallamas* (1931), illustrates two central aspects of Arlt's incorporation of cinema into literary representation: first, the novelistic simulation of the camera's capacity to register the minutiae of the urban landscape, and second, the simulation of the filmic procedure of montage to sequence series of images (or "shots") to represent the sensory experience of passing through the modern city. In the chapter, titled "Haffner cae," Arturo Haffner (alias El Rufián Melancólico, a pimp who participates in the secret society depicted in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*) passes through the center of Buenos Aires, unknowingly pursued by two men who will shoot and mortally wound him at the chapter's end. The narrator begins the passage situated fifty meters behind Haffner, and trails him as he crosses through the heart of the city:

> El Rufián Melancólico ha entrado ahora en una zona tan intensamente iluminada, que visto a cincuenta metros de distancia parece un fantoche negro detenido a la orilla de un crisol. Los letreros de gases de aire líquido reptan las columnatas de los edificios. Tuberías de gases amarillos fijadas entre armazones de acero rojo. Avisos de azul de metileno, rayas verdes de sulfato de cobre. Cabriadas en alturas prodigiosas, cadenas negras de guinches que giran sobre poleas, lubricadas con trozos de grasa amarilla. Más arriba, la noche enfoscada

> por el vapor humano. Haffner gira lentamente la cabeza, como un fantoche hipnotizado por el reverbero de un crisol.
>
> En las entrañas de la tierra, color mostaza, sudan encorvados cuerpos humanos. Las remachadoras eléctricas martillean con velocidad de ametralladoras en las elevadas vigas de acero. Chisporroteos azules, bocacalles detonantes de soles artificiales. Chrysler, Dunlop, Goodyear. Hombres de goma, vertiginosa consumación de millares de kilovatios rayando el asfalto de auroras boreales. Los subsuelos de los edificios de cemento armado vuelcan a la calle una húmeda frescura de frigoríficos.
>
> El Rufián escupe y camina. Rechupa la colilla de su cigarrillo y llena de aire sus pulmones. La ciudad entra en su corazón y se vuelca por sus arterias en fuerza de negación. (*Obras II*: 437)

Walter Benjamin famously proposes that, in the transition from theatre to film, the audience's identification shifts from the actor to the camera itself. Benjamin describes the camera's work in terms of the "[subjection] of the actor … to a series of optical tests" (228), highlighting the use of special camera angles and close-ups as "positional views" that the filmmaker will later sequence into the finished film. Here, the character's dramatic passage through the city is subjected to precisely this sort of testing, as the perspective repeatedly shifts back and forth from long shots of his shadowy figure, sequences of images of the surrounding cityscape, and close-ups of Haffner's face as he gazes outward at construction elevators, young women hurrying home, and, in the scene's climax, the two pistols wielded by the men who are about to mortally wound him. The disjointed syntax, in which verbs are frequently elided and paragraphs become extended series of images placed one after another, lends the passage a dehumanized quality.

Rather than filtering the experience of the city through the discourse of a human narrator, each of Arlt's sentences presents a fragmentary image that seems to be registered directly from the city streets.

Arlt often marks passages such as this, in which characters traverse the modern city, with metaphorical references to film. For example, as Estanislao Balder, the protagonist of his fourth and final novel, *El amor brujo*, travels through the city by train, "[e]l paisaje desfila ante los ojos de Balder como una película borrosa" (*Obras I*: 723). In another scene, Balder stands in a bustling crowd at a Buenos Aires train station, finding it impossible to spot Irene, the young woman he is searching for as "los rostros pasaban ante él con la prisa de un film" (*Obras I*: 668). In these instances, the character's experience of the urban landscape is explicitly framed in cinematic terms: the spectator experiences the city as the moviegoer experiences a film on screen. As Camenen explains, by identifying the text's perspective with the character's gaze, Arlt converts the subject into an observer "who is identified with the camera, taking in what lies in front of him at the present moment, and whose position (the manner in which the scene is framed, which the Arltian text always takes care to emphasize) determines the vanishing point." [72] Arlt's characters are regularly described in such terms, with their eyes functioning as what Camenen calls "eye-cameras" (130), scanning the cityscape and registering urban life in minute detail.

In the passage quoted above, however, there is also a clear endeavor to arrange the images registered by the "camera" in order to construct the scene in a manner similar to filmic montage. Two shots of Haffner's dark profile, which takes on a haunting, puppet-like aspect against a brilliantly illuminated backdrop of neon lights, introduce two distinct sequences. A

[72] Here and throughout, I have translated all quotes from Camenen's book from the original French.

vertically-organized sequence pans upward, with neon signs and construction cranes culminating in an image of a night sky clouded by the byproducts of human activity. Then, a horizontally-organized sequence registers street-level activity: construction workers at work on new foundations, cascading sparks produced by jackhammers, advertisements for automobile and tire companies, and neon lights everywhere. The "camera" finally returns to Haffner, this time closing in on his face to register a pair of details—he spits, and he takes a drag from a cigarette—that condense his distracted and disinterested attitude as he moves through the city center, unaware of his impending death. The chapter concludes, finally, with the collapse of the distance that separates the observer (who implicitly occupies the position of the two men following the Rufián Melancólico) from the character, as three shots are fired and Haffner turns around to face the image of the "dos brazos esgrimiendo pistolas" (*Obras I*: 440) who have just attacked him.

Unlike his prominent contemporary, Jorge Luis Borges, who admired the films of Josef von Sternberg and reflected on the possibility of simulating cinema's capacity to condense meaning into chains of powerful visual figures, Arlt did not explicitly address the technical issues involved in the inter-medial dialogue between film and literature. However, by marking the relation between his characters' perception of the modern cityscape and their movie-going experiences, Arlt highlights the ineludible presence of the cinematic way of seeing the world, even when one steps out of the theater. De los Ríos explains this presence of cinema as a sort of Derridean supplement: it is "[lo que] excede y lo que hace falta al acto de vagabundear: su suplemento, es decir lo que se hace antes y además de recorrer la ciudad" (465). In this light, the distinction sketched here, between the identification of the narrator with the camera, and a concurrent identification with the position of the director-monteur, takes on special significance. One might say that if, for Arlt, *all* film spectators are fatally incorporated into this new way of

seeing the world as if through the camera's lens, the artist, who protagonizes this montage-like act of cutting and arranging these images of modern life to produce aesthetic effects, maintains a qualitative difference from the common spectator through processes of artistic simulation.

Arlt's representations of the modern city constitute only one side of his cinematographic techniques: he concurrently utilizes psychological character studies to investigate the ways in which, as he puts it, "el cine está creando las modalidades de una nueva psicología en el interior" ("El cine" 111). Camenen, building on this thought, has studied in detail how Arlt draws on technological apparatuses associated with cinema and other new visual media to develop a visually-oriented conception of subjectivity that Camenen describes as that of the "subject-screen" (127). She explains that the diverse array of psychological character studies in Arlt's novels are notable for their deployment of a primarily visual schema for the representation of human thought processes. This leads Arlt to a conception of subjectivity that Camenen describes in terms of a recurrent situation: a character finds him or herself alone and enclosed in a dark, dimly lit space presented as "a dark cube into which a light nevertheless enters with difficulty, as if through a filter. He [the character] observes a series of images projected onto a surface. Thus, the Arltian text repeatedly makes use of the *dispositif* of the screen, often a filmic one" (127). These situations often explicitly reference cinema, such as in the following passage, where the Astrologer, the leader of the secret society whose rise and fall is narrated in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, sits in the dark study of his suburban estate. As he ponders a proposal presented to him by the novels' protagonist, Augusto "Remo" Erdosain, to kidnap and extort a man named Gregorio Barsut (whose presence in the novels will be discussed in detail later in this paper), he experiences a strange de-coupling of time:

> Y el Astrólogo, retenido dentro del tiempo del reloj, sentía deslizarse en su cerebro el otro tiempo rapidísimo e interminable que como una película cinematográfica, al deslizarse vertiginosamente, hería con las imágenes que aparejaba, su sensibilidad, de un modo impreciso y fatigante, ya que antes de percibir con claridad una idea ésta había desaparecido para ser sustituido por otra. (*Obras I*: 350).

The Astrologer is described as a spectator whose sensibility is bombarded by images projected onto a mental screen from an uncertain mental source: his psychic experience takes place in a sort of movie theater of the mind. As Camenen explains, this depiction of the character's mental processes eliminates all pretensions of depth: the unconscious is conceived not as an ideal, pre-linguistic register, but instead as a projector that emits a rapid cascade of images observed by the subject against the backdrop of a flat mental screen. Rather than preserving subjectivity as a realm of pure experience sealed off from the material conditions of characters' lives, Arlt repeatedly foregrounds the material apparatuses that structure their psychic experience by representing mental processes in terms of projectors, surfaces, dark rooms, and metallic sheets.[73] By deploying these technological apparatuses, Arlt rejects the possibility of conceiving subjectivity in terms of a pure, interior space safeguarded from the chaotic exterior world. His characters are immersed in a world of proliferating technological apparatuses, and his representation of their psychic lives attempts to account for how the new visual technologies of his time have radically altered the subjective experiences of the residents of Buenos Aires.[74]

[73] This treatment of subjectivity is not limited to Arlt's use of the cinematic apparatus; as Camenen explains, Arlt also draws on photographic technologies that convert the subject into a "receptacle of imprints, [thus] reducing interiority to the status of a two-dimensional medium" (133).

[74] Along similar lines, in a short 1926 essay titled "Poesía nueva," César Vallejo emphasizes that the impact of the new technologies of the 20th century on poetic production should be considered primarily in terms of the way they have altered modern subjectivities, rather than as mere lexical resources: "[l]os materiales artísticos que ofrece la

One important aspect of this project that Camenen does not directly address has to do with the grammatical means employed by Arlt to communicate these visual experiences of subjectivity. Arlt is clearly aware of the challenge of translating between visual and textual mediums, as indicated in a quote from early in *Los siete locos* where he explains how Erdosain, as he left his workplace and wandered the city streets, "[p]ensaba telegráficamente, suprimiendo preposiciones, lo cual es enervante" (*Obras I*: 163). Here, while the character's mind is described in terms of a technological apparatus (the telegraph), its functioning is framed in grammatical terms, underlining the fact that the task of representing technologically inflected psychic processes requires new linguistic strategies as well. Beyond describing characters as thinking "telegraphically" or "cinematographically," Arlt's narrators consistently pursue new ways of organizing language to simulate this experience. The scene mentioned above, where the Astrologer is unnerved by the way he is being cinematically bombarded with mental images illustrates the sorts of grammatical procedures used by Arlt to narrate characters' mental experiences. As the chapter progresses, the narrator's description of the character's mental state gives way to a stream-of-consciousness representation of the Astrologer's thoughts:

> 'Es necesario instalar fábricas de gases asfixiantes. Conseguirse químico. Células, en vez de automóviles camiones. Cubiertas macizas. Colonia de la cordillera, disparate. O no. Sí. No. También orilla Paraná una fábrica. Automóviles blindaje cromo acero níquel. Gases asfixiantes importante. En la cordillera y en el Chaco

vida moderna han de ser asimilados por el espíritu y convertidos en sensibilidad. El telégrafo sin hilos, por ejemplo, está destinado, más que a hacernos decir 'telégrafo sin hilos,' a despertar nuevos temples nerviosos, profundas perspicacias sentimentales, amplificando videncias y comprensiones y densificando el amor; la inquietud entonces crece y se exaspera y el soplo de la vida se aviva. Ésta es la cultura verdadera que da el progreso; éste es su único sentido estético, y no el de llenarnos la boca con palabras flamantes" (195). Despite Arlt's tendency to mark these changes with explicit reference to the screens, telegraphs, and so on, his treatment of new technological mediations of subjectivity falls in line with Vallejo's assertion.

> estallar revolución. Donde haya prostíbulos, matar dueños. Banda asesinos en aeroplano. Modo factible. Cada célula radiotelegrafía. Código y onda cambiante sincrónicamente. Corriente eléctrica con caída de agua. Turbinas suecas. Erdosain tiene razón. ¡Qué grande es la vida! ¿Quién soy yo? Fábrica de bacilos bubónica y tifus exantemático. (*Obras I*: 357)

His thoughts shift from register to register and from image to image, moving from existential questions concerning his own identity to glimpses of Swedish turbines and a weapons factory situated on the shores of the Paraná River. The above-mentioned suppression of prepositions is employed in multiple clauses, which would ordinarily read "Banda *de* asesinos," or "*en* la orilla *del* Paraná." In addition, the frequent use of punctuation marks imparts a rapid-fire aspect to the flow of his thoughts.[75] This choppy, punctuation-laden way of representing the Astrologer's thoughts underscores the manner in which a multiplicity of new media forms have altered modern subjectivity: the passage can be taken as a paradigmatic example of an Arltian character "thinking telegraphically" but it can also be read to possess a montage-like quality, as de los Ríos explains with respect to similar techniques employed by Arlt in his journalistic writings on cinema, where "la escritura misma opera como montaje, en el que cada componente de la enumeración es una unidad separada por puntos, los cuales actúan como sutura entre plano y plano, o más bien, entre enunciado y enunciado" (467). In the context of a scene that opens with the Astrologer's own recognition of how his thoughts have taken on a "cinematographic" quality,

[75] Arlt's use of punctuation is relatable to the strategies used by other prominent authors of his time to try and represent characters' streams of consciousness: it reads, for example, as an almost-parodic inversion of the punctuation-less last page of James Joyce's *Ulises* as translated by Jorge Luis Borges: in Borges's translation, published in *Proa* a few years before Arlt wrote *Los siete locos*, only a single comma appears in the nearly two-page text. See James Joyce, "La última hoja del Ulises," trans. Jorge Luis Borges. *Proa* 6 (Jan. 1925): 8-9, as well as Borges's short article on Joyce which precedes the translated fragment of Joyce's novel. Arlt, who was friends with key contributors to *Proa* such as Ricardo Güiraldes, would probably have had access to Borges's translation.

Arlt's narrator's attempt to encounter syntactical means of communicating the montage-like nature of his character's thoughts underlines the degree to which Arlt seeks to account for the effect that cinema's characteristic montage of images has had on spectators' minds.

Camenen indicates that the two aspects of Arlt's cinematic techniques sketched here (his depiction of the city as a vast sequence of images, and his use of technological apparatuses to evacuate the subject of interiority) are complementary in nature. She explains their relation by drawing on a 1993 essay on Arlt by Argentine writer César Aira in which he describes Arlt's literature as expressionistic in nature. Aira defines expressionism as a method in which the artist projects him or herself into the world, and clarifies that this "world" is the symbolic field (rather than the "real" world): "[e]l expresionista … da un paso adelante, salta al mundo, montado en palabras" (55). For Aira, expressionism elides the gap separating the subject's interiority and the exterior world, unlike impressionism, which hardens the divide between the subject and outside reality. The fact that Arlt uses similar techniques in representing characters' mental processes and the modern city can thus be attributed to the fact that, having first committed to an expressionistic mode of representation, the division between inside and outside ceases to be operational. By projecting himself into the material and precluding the possibility of assuming a position of artistic or critical distance, the writer is trapped, writhing in the symbolic material, and has no other choice than to "[aferrarse] a pesar de todo a los patrones visuales de la representación (no existen otros)" (56). Importantly, Aira insists that, prior to any discussions of its existential or affective roots, an artist's election of expressionism should be understood as "una cuestión formal. En el comienzo de toda peripecia hay un proyecto artístico, y no hay otra cosa" (56). Camenen, following Aira, insists on the need to understand Arlt's artistic practices in primarily formal terms, and she furthermore echoes his emphasis on the patterns of visual

representation employed by Arlt, justifying her study of the Arltian "subject-screen" by explaining that "it is necessary, in effect, to understand Arlt's expressionism as the mental disposition of a subject, a manner of seeing and feeling that defines an aesthetic program" (113). She links Arlt's election of expressionism as a mode of representation to his immersion in the visual culture of the time, elaborating in *Roberto Arlt: écrire au temps de l'image* a perspective on his novelistic practices that could be thought of as a *cinematic* expressionism.

ARLT'S MOVIEGOERS: CINEMATIC BOVARISM IN HIS FOUR NOVELS

Camenen proposes from the outset to read Arlt's novels as "textimages" (109), explicitly privileging the category of image over that of plot. She justifies this decision in the following manner: in addition to her broad claim that Arlt writes in the context of the triumph of the image, she argues that Arlt's readers are more likely to retain in their memories the striking images that Arlt deploys in his novels, rather than the chaotic, disorganized plot that unfolds over the course of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*: "[c]olors, forms, images, and, on occasion, bits of dialogue; these are the things we remember from Arlt's most celebrated novels, images rather than narratives" (112). This is a somewhat surprising statement. While the novels *are* chaotic (as generations of readers have noted and often criticized), the stories narrated in their pages are in truth quite memorable.[76] However indelibly Arlt's images imprint into readers' memories, they

[76] José Bianco's 1961 essay "En torno a Roberto Arlt," published in *Casa de las Américas*, is highly critical of the relative poverty of Arlt's style, and can be taken as representative of a broader mid-century tendency to condemn Arlt's faults. In a recent monograph on the fictions of Juan Carlos Onetti, Mario Vargas Llosa echoes Bianco's condemnation, confessing that he is skeptical of the "supuesta genialidad de Arlt," whom he refers to as "un pésimo prosista y un desastroso constructor de historias" (44). Vargas Llosa's vision of Arlt's place in Latin American literary history is nonetheless helpful, and broadly supports the analysis of his cinematographic techniques elaborated here. As he puts it, despite Arlt's faults, "lo cierto es que sus novelas de personajes desquiciados y argumentos truculentos y apocalípticos, y su prosa torrencial trufada de expresiones populacheras—el lunfardo—en la que un Buenos Aires en plena expansión urbana e industrial aparece transfigurado en una suerte de Moloch devorador de esa humanidad aplastada por la urbe o en un gigantesco decorado de Hollywood para una

are also likely to remember the plans, meetings, and eventual downfall of the secret society headed by the Astrologer; the trials and tribulations of Erdosain's estranged wife Elsa; the criminal activities and dramatic death of the Rufián Melancólico; the story of Hipólita, the Astrologer's eventual accomplice, who in her youth turned her back on a life as a domestic servant and resolved to become a prostitute, later marrying the crazed, bible-quoting pharmacist Ergueta; the kidnapping and unlikely escape of Gregorio Barsut; and, looming above them all, the narrative of Erdosain's anguished final days, culminating in his murder of the young girl he has promised to marry and his subsequent suicide. The novels are not lacking in compelling stories, and while the way they are pieced together is disordered, such that, as Camenen notes, the act of reconstructing the multiple narrative threads into a single plot arc is "rather unnatural and requires effort" (111), this does not necessarily mean that the novels' imagistic brilliance coexists with a lack of compelling stories. The following pages do not necessarily aim to contest her privileging of the image as the primary level at which the cinematic influence manifests itself in Arlt; rather, they aim to supplement and expand her study of the place of cinema in his novels, by demonstrating how Arlt, by elaborating a complex, multi-leveled strategy of novelistic Bovarism, incorporates a diversity of plots associated with cinema and its emergence into the heart of his novels.

It is helpful to begin with a moment when Arlt deploys a cinematic image in the context of a highly "cinematic" plot. Early in *Los siete locos*, the novel's narrator (who relates the story in the past tense, in the wake of Erdosain's death) explains how, from time to time, Erdosain would experience "una esperanza apresurada [que] lo lanzaba a la calle" (*Obras I*: 166). On these

superproducción terrorífico-policial, marcaron una frontera novedosa—urbana, expresionista, barriobajera, semifantástica—con la literatura regionalista todavía en pleno auge y, también, con la acicalada, académica y a menudo soporífica literatura urbana ya en pie, de la que el director del suplemento literario de *La Nación*, Eduardo Mallea, era eximio representante" (44).

occasions, he would take a bus to a relatively peripheral neighborhood such as Palermo or Belgrano and stroll its quiet avenues, letting his mind wander. Erdosain is then directly quoted in a passage that is marked as a typical daydream (rather than a specific one) due to the narrator's use of the imperfect tense to explain how Erdosain "[r]ecorría las silenciosas avenidas, diciéndose" (*Obras I*: 166). He then shifts to the first person, transcribing Erdosain's thoughts as he roams the city streets:

> Me verá una doncella, una niña alta, pálida y concentrada, que por capricho maneje su Rolls-Royce. Paseará tristemente. De pronto me mira y comprende que yo seré el único amor de toda su vida, y esa mirada que era un ultraje para todos los desdichados, se posará en mí, cubiertos sus ojos de lágrimas … Será millonaria, pero yo le diré: 'Señorita, no puedo tocarla … porque estoy casado.' Pero ella le ofrecerá una fortuna a Elsa para que se divorcie de mí, y luego nos casaremos, y en su yate nos iremos al Brasil. (*Obras I*: 167)

The centerpiece of this narrative is a powerful image of the tearful face of the rich young girl, captured at the exact moment when she comprehends her love for Erdosain. In its emphasis on this moment of initial recognition between the male and female leads, Erdosain's fantasy follows a pattern employed in 1920s films, such as those of Rudolph Valentino, which, as Miriam Hansen explains, are invariably set in motion by similarly choreographed exchange of looks between Valentino and his love object.[77] In comparison with his rather cursory summary of the major events of the fantasy (romantic encounter, divorce, escape to Brazil), Erdosain describes

[77] See Hansen's "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship," pp. 11-13. Interestingly, Erdosain situates himself as the object of the girl's gaze, reversing what Hansen describes as the "gender economy of vision" (13) that structures these scenes. This reversal of positions (in his fantasy, Erdosain occupies the place of the female lead) will be discussed below.

the moment when her eyes fall on him in lush detail, privileging the cinematic image in his fantasy in a manner that supports Camenen's claim about the ascendancy of the image in Arlt's novels as a whole. The image, however, is situated within a narrative that is itself strongly cinematic: his fantasy of being "saved" by a wealthy, beautiful young girl who senses his despair fits into a blueprint for popular cinema famously sketched by Siegfried Kracauer in "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies." For Kracauer, popular cinema's use of romance narratives depicting the sudden social ascendancy of lower-class individuals is a means for society to absolve itself of its guilty conscience regarding the suffering of the collective masses, and is a fundamentally conservative gesture: "saving individual people is a convenient way to prevent the rescue of an entire class" (295). Erdosain's fantasy of love, riches, and escape to Brazil, delivered to him through the goodness of an upper-class woman who happens to pick him (and specifically him) out of a multitude of fellow-sufferers demonstrates that he has interiorized not only this basic storyline, but also the conventions employed in films to narrate it.

One might object that there is nothing necessarily cinematic about this plot: depictions of love at first sight and love conquering all obstacles (including class differences) are the stuff of popular literature as well. From the opening pages of *Los siete locos*, however, the narrator takes pains to underline the cinematic inspiration of Erdosain's fantasies. Just a few pages before the passages cited above, for example, he explains how Erdosain would often dream of escaping his oppressive everyday routine in favor of an existence where "el mañana no fuera la continuación del hoy con su medida de tiempo, sino algo distinto y siempre inesperado como en los desenvolvimientos de las películas norteamericanas" (*Obras I*: 164). This pattern, where Erdosain compares an idealized cinematic reality to a degraded, non-cinematic life, repeats itself on multiple occasions across the two novels, such as when Erdosain meets a man known as the

Buscador de Oro. He is surprised by the man's gaunt, youthful visage, since he had imagined him "de acuerdo a los cánones de la cinematografía, un hombre enorme, de barbazas rubias apestando a bebidas. No había tal cosa" (*Obras I*: 290). He repeatedly notes how his life falls pitifully short of its cinematic analogue, wondering, for example, whether it ever would have been possible for him to live a heroic life, "[l]a vida fuerte que hace de pronto que una existencia se nos aparezca sin los tiempos previos de preparación y que tiene la perfecta soltura de las composiciones cinematográficas" (*Obras I*: 308). In Erdosain's life, the movies have exposed him to vivid images of heroes and storylines that lay out another adventurous and heroic way of living, and he consistently views his own life, in comparison, as a disappointment.

Erdosain's fantasies, which draw inspiration from the content of the films he has purportedly viewed during the many empty hours of a life characterized by a series of failed professional endeavors and extended periods of unemployment, stand in contrast to another type of cinema-related fantasy voiced by many of Arlt's other characters.[78] In these scenarios, characters draw inspiration not from films themselves (or rather, only indirectly from them), but instead from a series of stories related to the rise of Hollywood. They dream of traveling to California to become movie stars, of wooing Greta Garbo or Rudolph Valentino, and of exploiting the propagandistic capacities of film technology in their revolutionary plans. Barsut, whose particular uses of cinema will be discussed in detail below, voices an elaborate fantasy of making it big in Hollywood, winning the hand of Garbo, and returning to Buenos Aires to see his

[78] Arlt demonstrates a special interest in the movie-going habits of the city's unemployed men in a 1932 newspaper column titled "El cine y los cesantes." He describes a man, beaten down by rejection and depressed at the prospect of returning home to his wife, once again without any positive news. As that man dejectedly wanders the streets, "de pronto, ante sus ojos reluce el cartel azul, Amarillo canario, verde emperador, de un letrero de cine. Veinte centavos la entrada … Tres secciones por veinte centavos. Tres horas de olvido y de ensueño por veinte guitas" (92). While *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas* never depict Erdosain visiting a movie theater, it is easy to imagine him following in the footsteps of the man described in Arlt's column.

name in lights on every street corner. Zulema, a supporting character in *El amor brujo*, falls in love with Rudolph Valentino, filling her house with portraits of the actor whom her husband bitterly refers to as "ese cocainómano" (*Obras I*: 820) and later writing an imaginative novel in which, as her husband explains, "ella era la protagonista y el tal [Valentino] aparecía envuelto en una robe de chambre fantástica" (821).[79] The Astrologer, whose elaborate fantasies of revolution and world domination occupy a prominent place in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, frequently cites the importance of cinema as a powerful tool for forging a spiritual connection with the masses, such as when he describes a proposed propaganda project filmed deep in the American jungle. The film's prospective star, he explains, will represent "un término medio entre Krisnamurti y Rodolfo Valentino... pero más místico, una criatura que tenga un rostro extraño simbolizando el sufrimiento del mundo" (*Obras I*: 275). These fantasies, in which Valentino and Garbo tend to occupy the place of early Hollywood stars by antonomasia, are distinct from Erdosain's dreams of escape in that they are not inspired by films themselves, but instead by a series of narratives related to the film industry's spectacular emergence and the consequent possibilities of attaining fame, fortune, and power through film.

In general, as Ricardo Piglia emphasizes, both types of fantasies should be understood in terms of Arlt's critical view of the rise of mass cultural forms such as Hollywood film, serial novels (*folletines*), and modern, tabloid-style newspapers such as *El Mundo*, where Arlt's columns were published on a daily basis.[80] "Hay una crítica muy frontal de Arlt a lo que

[79] For a similar depiction of the supposedly pernicious effect that Valentino was having on the young women of Buenos Aires, see Enrique Méndez Calzada's "La enamorada de Rodolfo Valentino," which ironically narrates the end of an engagement between two young people: the future husband, searching the contents of his fiancée's purse for an image of himself (he had previously let her see the contents of his wallet), instead finds one of the actor Rodolfo Valentino and abruptly breaks off his relationship with the young woman. For an in-depth consideration of Valentino and female film spectatorship, see Hansen's "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship."

[80] For studies of Arlt's use of the *folletín*, especially in his first novel and his first work of theatre (*300 millones*), see Adolfo Prieto, "Silvio Astier, lector de folletines," and Sylvia Saítta, "Traiciones desviadas, ensoñaciones

podríamos llamar la producción imaginaria de masas" (*Crítica y ficción* 25), Piglia explains, proposing that Arlt's critical stance on mass culture is articulated through what he describes as "una especie de bovarismo social" (25) in which characters draw on their readings (and viewings) in order to escape their degraded everyday realities, formulating (consciously or unconsciously) alternate conceptions of their selves based on the fictions they have consumed. These conceptions, in turn, come to govern their actions and behaviors.[81] Cinema is certainly not the only source for these fantasies, but it does comes to occupy an increasingly larger place in Arlt's characters' lives, from the largely "literary" fantasies of Silvio Astier to the cinematographic ones elaborated by a growing cast of dreamers in *Los siete locos*, *Los lanzallamas*, and *El amor brujo*, who conceive their lives in terms of the interaction between two distinct planes, an imaginary plane populated by the images and stories they have consumed in the movie theater, and, in sharp contrast, an everyday life that only rarely provides the sorts of contentment and happiness that movie characters seem to attain so regularly and naturally.

By tracing these processes of cinematic bovarism, Arlt illustrates the effect that movies, and especially the Hollywood movies that draw increasingly large audiences in Buenos Aires, have had on city dwellers whose minds are increasingly filled with an ever-growing archive of characters, storylines, and experiences. They idolize actors such as Rodolfo Valentino and Greta

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imposibles: los usos del folletín en Roberto Arlt." Beatriz Sarlo's *La imaginación técnica* contains a thorough study of the way in which stories concerning inventions and new technologies that appeared in the popular presses of Buenos Aires during the early 20th century influenced the fantasy lives of Arlt and his characters.

[81] In this context, Masiello suggests a distinction between two specific models of reading that guide the action of Arlt's novels: "la primera se basa en la técnica de escapismo, utilizado en el romance popular y el cine; la segunda, por una técnica de transformación, proporcionado por la poesía y el discurso científico" (211). The first model provides the means for characters like Silvio Astier and Remo Erdosain to transcend their life situations, but proves ultimately fallow; the second, in which readings of books of poetry by Charles Baudelaire as well as scientific manuals and other technical materials allow for the creative transformation of the self into the sort of poet-inventor paradigmatically represented by the protagonist of Arlt's first novel, Silvio Astier. The following pages will propose the existence of a third category, composed by characters such as Gregorio Barsut, who utilize the popular romances of cinema precisely as sources for techniques of personal transformation.

Garbo. They dream of making it big in Hollywood. They compare their own selves to Hollywood character types such as the "dactilógrafa aventurera" (*Obras I*: 165) and the "millonario 'melancólico y taciturno'" (179). And, finally, they seek to fit their own life experiences into the narratives filled with romance, adventure, and sudden twists of fate that they have been exposed to in the city's hundreds of movie theaters. In this way, Arlt, who in a 1933 newspaper column reflects on the sight of audiences leaving a theater in a small town in Argentina and asks rhetorically, "¿cuántas futuras madames Bovaris [sic] respirarán aquí?" ("El cine" 110), elaborates in his novels a systematic investigation of the intersection between Hollywood fantasies and everyday life in Buenos Aires.

Two additional aspects of Arlt's treatment of cinematic Bovarism bear special consideration. In the first place, it is important to recognize that, even though Arlt's novels generally underline the chasm separating his characters' lives and the lives represented on movie screens, they also depict a relatively reduced number of situations in which life *does* approximate the movies. In these instances, Arlt's narrators consistently underline the somatic effects produced by this surprising superposition of life and cinema. One such situation occurs in *Los siete locos*, when an exhausted and despairing Erdosain confides his problems to Hipólita. She beckons him to rest his weary head on her lap. Erdosain notes that in that momento, "la vida adquiría ese aspecto cinematográfico que siempre había perseguido" (*Obra I*: 339). This fleeting synthesis of life and cinema produces a soothing, narcotic effect in him, which the narrator explains in the following terms: "[u]na enorme dulcura estaba en él" (339). In a scene of *Los lanzallamas* that will be discussed in detail below, Gregorio Barsut describes a similarly drug-like effect: he explains that when life takes on a cinematic quality, "[l]os nervios se me ponen tirantes … [y el] alma me parece entonces que anda por la cresta de una nube" (597). Here,

Scalabrini's condemnation of cinema as "un estupefaciente tan poderoso como el opio o la morfina" (141) appears to be confirmed, but with an added twist: in these scenarios, Arlt's moviegoers are depicted as pursuing the narcotic feeling that cinema provides them *even when they exit the theater and resume their everyday lives*. Erdosain and Barsut want their lives to provide the same sort of experience the have had in the movie theater, they revel in the fleeting moments when it does, and they often fall into states of abject disappointment when it does not.[82]

In the second place, it must be emphasized that Arlt's narrators consistently condemn their characters' pursuit of these sort of cinematic moments. Returning once again to Scalabrini's condemnation of Hollywood film, one could say that they seek to underline the pitfalls that go along with treating cinema (or, in these cases, a "cinematized" type of life experience) as "un sustituto de la vida en que el uso de la vida se relaja" (141). This "relaxation" or letting down of one's guard is abundantly clear in the scene where Hipólita comforts an exhausted Erdosain. As he is caught up in this blissful moment where life *has* surprisingly become like the movies, he is blind to the fact that his interlocutor is not participating in the experience. In fact, she interprets his ecstatic state as a clear sign of weakness: as he rests his head against her legs, the narrator explains that "no se le ocurrió pensar que Hipólita, tiesa en el sofa, pensaba que él era un débil y un sentimental" (339). He goes on to describe Hipólita's disdain for the weakness that men like Erdosain demonstrate when they let down their guard and rest their heads on her legs (as a prostitute, she has experienced this situation many times before). In *Los lanzallamas*, Hipólita goes on to betray Erdosain's confidence in her, telling his secrets to the Astrologer and forming a

[82] It bears mentioning that these moments are not always pleasant in nature: in the scene discussed above, where the Astrologer **feels as if time has come unhinged and feels "[en] su cerebro el otro tiempo rapidísimo e interminable … como una película cinematográfica" (*Obras I*: 350), he is clearly bothered by the way the constant bombardment of images "hería … su sensibilidad, de un modo impreciso y fatigante" (*Obras I*: 350). Rather than producing a narcotic effect, this "cinematographic" experience appears to have caused the Astrologer a bad headache.**

secret alliance with him that will last through the end of the novel. By giving himself over to the "enorme dulcura" he feels in this scene, Erdosain proves himself to be something of a chump, and his weakness is exploited by Hipólita. It is perhaps in this light that his occupation of the role of the female lead in the fantasy analyzed above (where the young, Rolls-Royce-driving millionaire discovers and saves him) is best understood. Surrendering to the cinematic illusion, in the movie theater or in one's everyday life, is associated with a cluster of attributes—sentimentality, debility, weakness, vulnerability—that are all marked as highly "feminine" in nature. As Hipólita reflects on Erdosain's weakness, she is overcome with sadness precisely because, in her eyes, almost all the men she has met have ultimately proven themselves to be insufficiently masculine: "[t]odavía no he encontrado entre ellos uno digno de cortarle el pescuezo a los otros, o de ser un tirano. Dan lástima" (340).

While a discussion of Arlt's understanding of gender dynamics, as well as the misogyny exhibited across his fictional and journalist writings, exceeds the scope of this chapter, this feminization of Erdosain by way of his Bovaristic pursuit of a "cinematized" life marks him as a prototypical example of the type of cinema spectator repeatedly studied by Arlt in his journalistic articles, which often analyze the moviegoing habits of women and "weak" (i.e., unemployed and dejected) men.[83] Cinema excites them and populates their minds with unrealistic illusions. For Arlt, while life generally does not live up to the movies, they passively pursue fleeting moments where it does take on a pleasingly cinematic quality.

This is not, however, the only type of moviegoer depicted in the pages of Arlt's novels. There exists in Arlt's literary corpus another category of individuals who possess a remarkably sophisticated understanding of the cinematic illusion, rivaling that of the author himself. These

[83] For a thorough study of Arlt's mysogyny, see Elsa Drucaroff, *Arlt: profeta del miedo*.

characters, who come to occupy larger and larger places in Arlt's novels, demonstrate an acute interest in *actively* converting their lives into a vast cinematic production by manipulating social situations in order to produce precisely the sort of cinematic effect that Erdosain passively yearns for. They privilege acting over living, and revel in the artificiality of situations where they know themselves to be the only ones aware of the fundamental insincerity of their behavior.

Piglia concludes his brief discussion of Bovarism in Arlt with the following statement: "[l]a lectura, en Arlt, lleva a la perdición" (*Crítica y ficción* 24). In one sense, his comment is consistent with Arlt's treatment of these characters: the men and women in his novels who actively endeavor to "cinematize" their lives are among his most grotesque and negatively valorized characters, and their stories illustrate how, in different ways, cinema has come to constitute a powerful negative force in modern society. They are clearly meant to model flawed, anti-social behaviors. In another sense, however, they constitute a surprising exception to Piglia's linkage of reading and perdition: their negative characterization stands in paradoxical relation to the surprising success and social ascension they experience over the course of his novels. It will be argued here that this ironic success (they are essentially the *only* characters who come out ahead) indirectly expresses the author's anxieties concerning the expanding influence of Hollywood cinema, and also lays the groundwork for Arlt's reassertion of the artist's autonomy: he sees that these characters, like himself, have an acute and systematic understanding of how cinema works, but they use it the wrong way, directly aestheticizing (or "cinematizing") their lives in an artificial way. Arlt, on the other hand, uses his knowledge of cinema to "cinematize" his novelistic art, while nonetheless conserving a strict separation between "real life" and art.

This, to summarize, is the one-way street that Arlt seeks to construct between his modern novels and the urban life from which they emerge. And if on the one hand his undoing of prevalent distinctions between literary and non-literary materials and techniques through the incorporation of materials from outside of literature's sphere of competence falls very much in line with many of the more revolutionary readings of Arlt, I will argue in the following pages that his blurring of the line between the literary and the non-literary ultimately hinges on the reassertion of a rather traditional understanding of the artist's autonomy. After tracing the fate of the Arltian moviegoer, the concluding section of this chapter will ultimately argue that this reassertion of autonomy is grounded in Arlt's reception of the sociological concept of simulation. For Arlt, as for his Argentine peer José Ingenieros, the growing tendency of modern individuals to simulate the actions or behaviors of others is both one of the defining characteristics of sociocultural modernization and an ultimately negative tendency that must be exposed and condemned. One could thus speak of a negative social dramaturgy, or a negative performance theory of simulation, in their respective works. Both authors, on the other hand, ultimately defend the critical potential of *artistic* simulation. When a theater actor simulates the behaviors of an individual, or when a novelist simulates the montage procedures of a film director, the aesthetic (rather than utilitarian) aspirations of the simulation both guarantees its critical purchase on society and marks a key qualitative difference between artistic and non-artistic simulation.

The first, and most peripheral, of Arlt's moviegoers is Lucio, a friend of Silvio Astier in *El juguete rabioso* who, in the novel's first chapter, joins Silvio and his friend Enrique Irzubeta as they commit a series of petty crimes, culminating in the robbery of a school library. Lucio is presented in grotesque terms as a "majadero pequeño de cuerpo y lívido de tanto masturbarse"

(*Obras I*: 46) with a "cara tan de sinvergüenza que movía a risa" (46). He is *also* consistently depicted as a film enthusiast. He frequents the movies, and his behaviors betray his "vice": when he tells his friends vulgar anecdotes, he moves his arms "a semejanza de ciertos artistas de cinematógrafo" (46), and when he is told to stand watch as Silvio Enrique rob the library, he throws the gun they give him in the air, grabbing it "con un cinematográfico gesto de apache" (57). These descriptions underline that Lucio has interiorized the gestures of the characters he sees on screen, recreating them to show off for his friends. In the novel's final chapter, which takes place three years later, Silvio has a chance encounter with Lucio, who has joined the police force and proudly boasts of his successful navigation of what he calls "la *struggle for life* de Darwin" (126). Throughout their encounter, Lucio's general comportment irritates Silvio, who notices the gaudy, fake-gold jewelry he is wearing and thinks that his friend has grown up to be "un recio pelafustán disfrazado de dandy" (126). Rita Gnutzmann, however, suggests that Lucio's "evolution" should also be conceived in terms of his continuing attachment to the movies: although he has changed sides, from robber to detective, "sigue imitando a ciertos tipos del cine negro o de mafiosos" (76). She furthermore notes that Silvio is once again able to recognize the essential falseness of his gestures: "[h]ace tan mal su nuevo papel que hasta el inocente Silvio sospecha de su fingido compañerismo" (76). Silvio, in other words, is not only irritated by his friend's success and his assimilation into the forces of law and order; in addition he chafes at the artificiality of the gestures and behaviors—copied from the film actors whose movements Lucio has learned to mimic— that his friend employs to succeed in his role in the "struggle for life."

Silvio's relationship with Lucio presages a relationship at the center of *Los siete locos* between Erdosain and Gregorio Barsut, the cousin of Erdosain's wife, Elsa. Like Lucio, Barsut is

initially presented through a description of his grotesque, distorted visage: "la cabeza rapada, la nariz huesuda de ave de presa, los ojos verdosos y las orejas en punta como las del lobo" (173). He inspires repulsion in Erdosain, and, like Lucio, he, has a predilection toward vulgarity, making obscene statements and gestures "por el solo placer de ultrajar la sensibilidad [de Erdosain]" (175). Finally, Barsut, like Lucio, is explicitly presented as a moviegoer. He articulates his remarkably sophisticated understanding of cinema late in *Los lanzallamas*, in an extensive conversation with Ergueta, a mentally unhinged pharmacist whom the Astrologer has preventively imprisoned due to his crazed, messianic ramblings and his increasingly erratic behavior. Barsut begins by explaining that for his entire adult existence he has thought of life as his own personal comedy: "[s]iempre estoy en comediante" (596), he affirms, explaining that "desde los diecisiete años que represento comedias" (599). He gives Ergueta a series of detailed examples of his "comedic" practices: when he slapped Erdosain in the face (in a scene that takes place in *Los siete locos*), he did so "para ver si yo podía hacer la parte de amante burlado" (596), and when he later kneeled in front of him to beg forgiveness, he thought to himself, "¡Qué efecto magnífico en cine hincarse frente al hombre que hemos golpeado!" (596). He demonstrates an acute understanding of the "cinematographic" mechanisms through which he is able to dupe those around him, explaining to Ergueta that he is being sincere with him (rather than representing his comedy) because the lighting is not right for him to play his role:

> '[n]o crea que le hablo en cinematógrafo. No. Si hubiera luz y usted me pudiera ver la cara, efectuaría la comedia. En la oscuridad no hay objeto. A la luz, sí, porque no podría resistir el impulso de creerme frente a la máquina fotográfica. Así, no. Estamos en la oscuridad, y apenas nos vemos el brillo de los ojos.' (599-600)

Barsut's understanding of how certain ambient conditions (the right lighting, in this passage) are necessary if he is to pull off his "comedia" establishes a key difference between himself and Erdosain. They both notice the way that life can fleetingly take on a cinematic quality, but Barsut, unlike Erdosain, has reflected extensively on how exactly cinema produces this type of experience. Moreover, while both Erdosain and Barsut exhibit a certain pleasure related to life's assumption of cinematic qualities, Barsut has consciously made these moments the central pursuit of his life: "Lo único que me interesa son las comedias" (597), as he puts it. He goes on to explain to Ergueta that he revels in the pleasure he experiences when he becomes conscious that he is successfully pulling off his personal "comedy." It is a feeling that he cannot fully explain:

> 'Hay en mí algo que no me explico con claridad, y es la malignidad que se apodera de mis sentidos cuando hago una comedia.
>
> [E]l alma me parece entonces que anda por la cresta de una nube. Los nervios se me ponen tirantes. Me encuentro en la misma situación de un individuo que cruza un abismo por un puente de alambre'" (597).

In short, when Barsut enacts his comedy he feels high. As mentioned above, this narcotic effect is not unlike the fleeting pleasure experienced by Erdosain as he reclines his head into Hipólita's lap, although Barsut's altered state is more comparable to an adrenaline rush: Scalabrini could perhaps add "cocaína" or "anfetamina" to his list of drugs as powerful as cinema. Unlike Erdosain, however, Barsut knows how to get his fix by actively producing situations in which he can ensnare others in his cinematic illusions. The degree to which Barsut has thought about and studied cinema—the effect it has on audiences, and how this effect might be harnessed and

utilized in his day-to-day existence—outstrips that of the novels' other characters, coming here to constitute the core of his person as he presents himself to Ergueta.

Importantly, Barsut does not limit his cinematic manipulations of life to the pursuit of the sorts of fleeting narcotic feelings described above. He also constructs elaborate storylines in which he himself participates as the leading man. He gives Ergueta two examples of how he has done this: the first ends in failure, and is taken by Barsut as a learning experience that has taught him an important lesson concerning the risks of his incessant pursuit of "la comedia"; the second lays out a detailed plan (or fantasy) for the future that, at the novels end, will surprisingly come to fruition. In his first plan, he decides one day that he will "fall in love." Quotation marks are necessary here because he begins with the assumption that this will be nothing more than a more extended "comedia." He soon learns, however, that even cynical comedians such as himself can fall in love: "por cínico que sea, aquí está el error de la gente en creer que un cínico no puede enamorarse: yo me enamoré. Me enamoré en serio de una chiquilla" (599). He dates the young girl for two years until she breaks his heart by telling him that she has slept with another man and leaves him in a state of extreme anger and disillusionment—"[d]urante un mes la bilis se me volcó en sangre" (600). In the wake of this failure, in which the player comes to understand that he himself has been played, Barsut devises another, more far-reaching plan: he will to travel to Hollywood, make a name for himself, court a famous actress—Greta Garbo, to be specific—, and return to Buenos Aires to find his name in lights on every street corner. His motivation is to "humillar[] profundamente" (600) the woman who has broken his heart; as he puts it to Ergueta,

> '[e]s necesario que esa perra se encuentre con mi nombre en la ochava de todas las esquinas … Pasaré algún día frente a su casa levantando tierra con mi Rolls-Royce: impasible como un Dios. La gente me señalará con la mano diciendo: ¡Ése

es Barsut, el artista Barsut; viene de Hollywood, es el amante de Greta Garbo!' (600).

His plan is extensive and, ridiculous as it may seem to Ergueta (and to the reader, surely), he indicates that he's thought out many of the details, such as how long it will take him once he arrives in the United States to triumph on screen and then successfully court Greta Garbo. He has even practiced the speech he will give to his old acquaintances when they see him converted into a movie star.[84]

Barsut is a supporting actor in the two novels, which largely revolve around the interaction between Erdosain and the Astrologer. However, by the end of *Los lanzallamas*, as Masiello points out, it becomes clear that he has had a surprisingly central role in the development of the novels' plot. *Los siete locos* begins with Erdosain walking into the office of his superiors at the company where he works as a bill collector, the United Azucarer Company. They explain that he has been accused of stealing money from the company, and he's given until the next afternoon to pay back his debt. His desperate pursuit of funds leads him to the Astrologer's home, and, after the Rufián Melancólico offers to foot the bill (motivated in part by the Astrologer's high regard for Erdosain), Erdosain offers the Astrologer a potentially profitable

[84] Barsut's plan is remarkably similar to the plot of a Horacio Quiroga short story, "Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa." In Quiroga's story, the South American expatriate Guillermo Grant wins the heart of the actress Dorothy Phillips despite his relative poverty and insignificance in Hollywood social circles. He does so by manipulating his intimate knowledge of the canons of cinematographic narrative such that their real-life romance, unbeknownst to his future wife, unfolds like a movie screenplay (in a final twist, the narrator confesses to the reader in a short postdate appended to the story that the entire narrative of his romantic conquest had only been a fantasy: "Punto por punto, como acabo de contarlo, lo he soñado," 463). What Quiroga's character senses in "Miss Dorothy Phillips," and what Barsut also senses in *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, is the possibility of actively translating knowledge of cinema into a source of social power. As Arlt puts it in a note on cinema published in 1936, people go to the cinema in search of experiences and "[p]rocedimientos para mejor triunfar en la dirección de sus deseos" (20). By taking a step back and reflecting on the way that cinema is affecting *others*, these characters are able to articulate and set in motion plans for translating the techniques of cinema to their real-life social interactions; they understand, in short, that people ardently desire for their lives to unfold like the stories told on movie screens, and if they can make others feel like this cinematic unfolding of life is actually taking place, they can manipulate the people around them, using cinematic means to attain their desired ends.

plan that would give the society the capital it needs to set its plan in motion: they can kidnap Barsut and extort him of his inheritance. Barsut is at the end of this chain of events, but he is also at the beginning: he is the one who originally turned Erdosain in to his employers, and his words thus set in motion the process that eventually leads to his kidnapping. Moreover, as Masiello points out, his role as the catalyst who sets the novel's machinations in motion is not limited to a single act of betrayal: from the opening pages of *Los siete locos*, his fantasies "generan todas las acciones que se describirán en las novelas" (219), all the way up to the murder committed by Erdosain and his suicide in the closing pages of *Los lanzallamas*. Erdosain kills the daughter of Barsut's ex-landlord, a woman of whom Barsut spoke of with open disdain, and Barsut tells Erdosain about his own desire to commit suicide early in *Los siete locos*. Masiello describes him as Erdosain's double as well as his adversary, and specifies that he functions as "la oscura sombra que ronda llevando destrucción en las novelas" (219). Lurking behind the scenes, he acts as "uno de los administradores secretos" (219) of the actions and exchanges that link the novels' characters to each other.

At the end of *Los lanzallamas* the secret society is in shambles. Erdosain's murder of the Bizca sets in motion a massive police manhunt and a concurrent mass-media frenzy. As Erdosain hides in the home of the narrator/commenter and feverishly recounts his story over the course of three days, a series of dominoes relating to the secret society begin to fall. Barsut has escaped, and he is later caught trying to make a purchase with the counterfeit bills the Astrologer has given him to repay the initial sum of money they extorted from Barsut. The Astrologer, accompanied by Hipólita, has fled the city carrying the real money and remains on the lam. His estate has burnt to the ground, and the police have found the cadaver of his henchman Bromberg. As the society crumbles and Erdosain finishes telling his story, he asks the narrator to

accompany him to the train station, says goodbye to him, gets on a train, and pulls the gun he used to kill "la Bizca" out of his pocket, shooting himself in the chest. His suicide sets off a mad dash in which reporters and photographers stream out from the city's newspaper offices, desperately seeking to be the first on the scene to document the demise of "el feroz asesino Erdosain" (632) as their bosses wring their hands at the prospect of increased sales. The final chapter of *Los lanzallamas* concludes with the words of a newspaper's chief of sales who, when he hears of Erdosain's death, immediately comprehends its implications: "Macanudo. Mañana tiraremos cincuenta mil ejemplares más…" (633).

In this context of death and destruction, it is truly surprising when the narrator explains in the final paragraphs of the brief epilogue at the close of *Los lanzallamas* that things appear to be going exactly how Barsut had planned: "Barsut, cuyo nombre en pocos días había alcanzado el maximum de popularidad, fue contratado por una empresa cinematográfica que iba a filmar el drama de Temperley" (637). When the narrator last sees him, Barsut has a short conversation in which he comes off as "maravillado y sumamente contento de su suerte" (637). "'Ahora sí que verán mi nombre en todas las esquinas. Hollywood. Hollywood. Con esta película me consagraré. El camino está abierto'" (637). Of course, his surprising success in parlaying his role in the "drama de Temperley" into the movie role that, he hopes, will serve as his springboard to a career in Hollywood, should not be taken as the narrator's tacit confirmation that he has acted in an appropriate or strategic manner. Throughout the novels, he is uniformly portrayed as a cynical, depraved individual, dangerously addicted to the rush he gets when he successfully manipulates life as if it were a movie, and willing to manipulate all those around him in order to enact his "comedia."

Piglia concludes his comments on Arlt's critique of mass cultural production by asserting that the sorts of Bovaristic behaviors represented in his novels are not limited to his characters' lives; rather, they come to occupy a central place in the actions that unfold in his novels' pages, "form[ando] parte del motor básico de la trama" (*Crítica y ficción* 25). In this light, Masiello's discussion of the way Barsut secretly administers the plots of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanallamas* lays the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of how the novels' characters are guided by, and ultimately engulfed by, mass-cultural representations. In this light, it is significant that *Los lanzallamas* culminates *not* in Erdosain's suicide, *nor* in the details of the collapse of the Astrologer's secret society, but instead in the narrator's detailed study of how their stories were captured and disseminated by the mass media, culminating in Barsut's contract with the Hollywood studio. By framing the demise of Erdosain, the Astrologer, and the secret society in terms of its representation in the mass media—first in the sensationalist news media, then Hollywood—, Arlt's narrator closes the two-novel series with a powerful final recognition of the convergence between his characters' social existence and the mass-mediatic representations of life that have penetrated to the very core of their subjectivities. As Fernando Rosenberg points out, *Los lanzallamas*'s concluding metafictional "explosion of narratives shifting between film, novel, and journalistic report … reaches out toward an inquiry of social mediation in the construction of reality, even deep inside the interior life of subjective reveries" (70). By dissolving the novelistic narrative into a broader ecology of media forms that are competing to discover and re-present the facts regarding Erdosain and the secret society, the narrator illustrates the distinct layers that are superposed in this process of mediation; moreover, by positioning Barsut's impending voyage to California at the end of this chain of mediations, he positions Hollywood cinema, and its capacity to capture, reproduce, and re-transmit stories from around

the globe, in a privileged position as the media form that, in a sense, comes to have the last word in the construction of the reality of the events narrated in the novels. The newspaper reporters and their cameramen arrive on the scene almost immediately; the narrator of the novels hurriedly composes his books from Erdosain's testimony and his additional investigations into the story; and, finally, looming in the future, a film studio will present its own version of the events to audiences around the world, diverging sharply from the novels by re-casting Barsut as the hero of the story of Erdosain and the secret society.

While the story of Gregorio Barsut concludes in the epilogue of *Los lanzallamas*, his character lives a surprising afterlife in Arlt's fourth and final novel, *El amor brujo*, the plot of which reproduces Barsut's story of how he, a man in his mid-20s, had an extended romance with a teenage girl, only for her to reveal to him that she had slept with another man. In *El amor brujo*, Barsut's character is reborn as Estanislao Balder, who meets a high school student named Irene one day on the train and begins courting her, at first treating his relationship with the young girl as an elaborate act, only to later discover that he has fallen in love. Balder, like Barsut, is presented as a grotesque figure with a slight hunch-back and the beginnings of a pot belly (as the narrator puts it, despite being only 27 years old, Balder "echaba vientre," *Obras I*: 687), characteristics which are complemented by slovenly clothing, unkempt hair, and ink-stained fingernails. He is also depicted as a man who, like Barsut, possesses an acute understanding of the way in which, as cinema becomes increasingly popular among the men and women of Buenos Aires, the line between living one's life and playing a part in a "comedy" is increasingly blurry. This perspective is underlined from the novel's opening chapter (significantly titled "Balder va en busca del drama"), which establishes the novel's primary intent of offending the sensibility of middle-class readers through its grotesque dramatization of how Balder, a married

man, visits Irene's home and convinces her mother to let him date her daughter. "'La comedia ha comenzado'" (645), he thinks as Irene's mother enters the room. Throughout, the novel's third-person narrator, whose description of the events is heavily focalized through Balder, makes a series of commentaries on how the people participating in the scene appear to be playing parts. Irene's mother "se detuvo … con gesto de primera actriz ofendida" (645), and she later has an outburst of "romanticismo de película barata" (650). Balder, for his part, feels the increasing urge "de burlarse de sí mismo y de los que le escuchaban" (649), observing how, as the scene unfolds, "el bufo se mezclaba en él con el tragediante" (649). This is precisely the sort of language used by Barsut in *Los lanzallamas*, and the opening chapter further reinforces the intertextual connection between the novels by incorporating an almost exact transcription of Barsut's statements about falling in love: in *El amor brujo*, the narrator says of Balder that "[é]l podía ser un cínico, pero nada prive que un cínico se enamore. Y él estaba enamorado de Irene" (648).[85]

Arlt's final novel exacerbates some of the Bovaristic tendencies present in his previous characters to almost hyperbolic lengths, most notably in a series of fantasies in which Balder, building on Barsut's dreams of moving to the United States, imagines himself in a fantasy world that he refers to throughout the novel as "El País de las Posibilidades," where he drives his Hudson automobile through a snowy landscape to arrive home, where his all-American wife will have prepared a nice meal and they will dine "[mientras] afuera acumula la nieve" (727). *El amor brujo* is also notable for elaborating perhaps the clearest statement on cinema that exists in Arlt's novelistic corpus, in a chapter where the novel's narrator employs indirect discourse to

[85] For comparison, Barsut's words are as follows: "por cínico que sea, aquí está el error de la gente en creer que un cínico no puede enamorarse: yo me enamoré. Me enamoré en serio de una chiquilla" (599).

communicate Balder's sociological understanding of the many "fenómenos curiosos" (695) that he observes in late-1920s Buenos Aires society. The heart of Balder's vision of city life is expressed in the following statement: "[u]n terrible mecanismo estaba en marcha, sus engranajes se multiplicaban. Hombres y mujeres constituían hogares basados en mentiras permanentes" (695). Balder immediately links this "terrible mechanism" to the expanded presence of North American cinema: he sees city-dwellers fantasizing about wealth, material goods, and social ascension, and opines that "los orígenes de semejante delirio" could perhaps be found in "la estructura de la industria cinematográfica norteamericana confeccionada especialmente para satisfacer las exigencias primitivas de estos países rurales" (695). The narrator goes on to articulate Balder's basic position on the cinema:

> El cine, deliberadamente ñoño con los argumentos de sus películas, y depravado hasta fomentar la masturbación de ambos sexos, dos contradicciones hábilmente dosificadas, planteaba como única finalidad de la existencia y cúspide de suma felicidad, el automóvil americano, la cancha de tenis americana, una radio con mueble americano, y un chalet standard americano, con heladera eléctrica también americana. De manera que cualquier mecanógrafa, en vez de pensar en agremiarse para defender sus derechos, pensaba en engatusar con artes de vampiresa a un cretino adinerado que la pavoneara en una voiturette. (695).

Balder's consciousness of the cultural geopolitics of cinematic production and distribution situates him, and Arlt himself, in line with the ideas expressed by other key figures of early-1930s Argentine intellectual life, most importantly Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, Arturo Jauretche, and the other young intellectuals grouped around the Fuerza de Orientación Radical de la Joven Argentina (FORJA) who presented early considerations of how imported films and other cultural

materials could negatively influence Argentine society.[86] He echoes Scalabrini's comparison between moviegoing and drug addiction in his understanding of how depravity and innocence are "hábilmente dosificadas" in the movies. He recognizes the way the movies propagate fantasies of extreme happiness, while connecting these fantasies more explicitly with an extreme form of materialism that involves amassing as many status symbols as possible.[87] Finally, he alludes to an alternative that he believes his contemporaries' obsession with Hollywood has foreclosed: the possibility of concerted political action among middle-class employees in the form of unionization.

With Estanislao Balder, the moviegoer comes to occupy center stage in Arlt's final novel. By setting Balder in sequence with his movie-going predecessors in Arlt's literary corpus, Lucio and Barsut, Arlt progressively elaborates a severe, far-reaching investigation of the dangers he associates with the pastime of movie-going. In this context, it is important to note the consistency of the results achieved across his four novels: these are the only characters who end up triumphing in Arlt's novelistic world, even as they are presented as grotesque monsters who are ugly in their appearance, their behaviors, and their moral values. Lucio joins the police force and seems to be progressing nicely in life, whereas Silvio finds himself stuck in a miserable job as an ambulatory bill collector. Barsut is on the verge of traveling to Hollywood while the rest of the novels' characters are engulfed in death, destruction, and misery. Balder, finally, manages to

[86] See Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica*, especially the chapter titled "La imaginación histórica," for an analysis of the emergence of FORJA and the positions taken by intellectuals such as Scalabrini and Jauretche regarding the cultural influence of the United States, as well as their formulation of a revisionist cultural nationalism.

[87] It is important to note that Balder seems relatively blind to his own tendency to participate in the same sorts of fantasies and consumptive pursuits (the Hudson automobile is ubiquitous in his fantasies of the "País de Posibilidades) as the people he describes here. In fact, while the struggle between cynically pretending to be in love with Irene and actually being in love with her forms the primary driving force of the novel, his relation with cinema is characterized by a similar struggle between maintaining his cynicism (he understands the cinematic illusion and its deleterious effects), and letting down his guard, consciously or not.

win a perverse bet with Irene: he accuses her of not being a virgin, she vehemently denies the allegation, and when they finally enter into sexual contact, Balder concludes that she was not, in fact, a virgin. He unceremoniously breaks off their relationship, and the novel closes with him re-joining his wife and child, escaping unscathed from his two-year romance and reassuming his role as family man and promising young architect.

Why is it that these characters succeed? Perhaps the strongest explanation for their surprising successes can be found in a principle of critical negativity that generations of readers have identified at the heart of Arlt's fictional corpus. For Arlt the failures and successes of his characters must be viewed within the horizon of his overarching objective of critiquing the dominant bourgeois social order and its prevailing value system. According to this model, the characters who succeed in Arlt's novels do so because they have successfully integrated themselves into to what Balder describes as the "terrible mecanismo" at the heart of society, while those who resist incorporation are doomed to failure.

The *locus classicus* of this perspective on Arlt's novels is Oscar Masotta's foundational monograph, *Sexo y traición en Roberto Arlt*, where the author proposes that at the heart of Arlt's representation of the social world is a hierarchy of persecutors who invariably victimize those below them: "[e]n el mundo de Arlt, la jerarquía social—como en el mundo real—es jerarquía de verdugos" (66). Masotta's reading draws primarily from the final chapter of *El juguete rabioso*, in which Silvio Astier shockingly betrays a close friend with whom he had plotted to rob the home of a wealthy engineer by visiting the engineer and turning in his friend hours before their planned robbery. Masotta reads this purportedly negative or "bad" action as laying bare the abject mechanism at the heart of the bourgeois society within which Silvio is fatally trapped: "[p]ara desapegarse de su clase [la clase media] le permanence leal … pero no encuentra otro

modo de hacerlo que poniendo al descubierto un mecanismo abyecto y ocupando el puesto de verdugo que ese mecanismo pretende dejar vacante" (63). The engineer is shocked by Silvio's betrayal of his friend precisely because Silvio has chosen to occupy the place of the persecutor, demonstrating the mechanism through which loyalty to the dominant bourgeois class implies persecution of those situated on the outside of that class. Silvio, whose forays into petty crime form an important part of the plot of *El juguete rabioso*, thus comes to understand that for as much as he resists bourgeois morality, he nonetheless cannot escape his destiny as a cog in this mechanism. In Arlt's novelistic world, he finds himself unable to simultaneously be loyal to his friend and disloyal to society, and his betrayal is thus both commendable (honest) and unthinkable (treasonous). *El juguete rabioso* concludes with Silvio's plan to flee the city and find a new life in the southern countryside of Argentina. The novel thus concludes by simultaneously proposing the possibility of a different life on the outside of the Arltian city, and underscores the impossibility of escaping the hierarchy of victims and persecutors that dictates life in the city.[88]

In this context, the stories of Silvio, Gregorio Barsut, and Estanislao Balder, who can be taken as prototypical representatives of the Argentine bourgeoisie and what Arlt conceives as its

[88] For a helpful survey of critical perspectives on the final chapter of *El juguete rabioso*, see Analía Capdevila, "Para una lectura política de la traición de Astier." Capdevila, drawing theoretical support from Nietzsche and Spinoza, among others, is interested in unearthing a positive impulse driving Silvio's betrayal, which she re-conceives in terms of a Nietzschean will to power in which Silvio becomes "*el auténtico traidor* … [al convertirse] finalmente en otro distinto del que era, alguien capaz de jugarse el todo por el todo, sin medir las consecuencias, hasta el extremo de perder, en lo que algunos llaman infamia, su identidad, su autonomía. Y esto porque, antes que traicionar una ley social, Astier obedece sin reservas a una ley anterior a cualquier comunidad: 'la ley de la ferocidad'; ley brutal que está dentro de uno y que exige la suspensión momentánea de la voluntad. A esa obediencia llamamos nosotros, tomando prestados los términos de Nietzsche, *voluntad de poder*" (54). In this reading, the "[naturaleza] profundamente afirmativo" (54) of Silvio's act is given ontological priority over the negative, critical impulse identified by Masotta. While this chapter proposes a return to Masotta's critical negativity to understand the paradoxical success of Arlt's moviegoers, it does not necessarily dispute Capdevila's findings. Rather, the dual reading of Arlt's uses of cinema offered here aims to balance "affirmative" and "negative" impulses by counterposing the author's way of using cinema to that of his characters. In line with Capdevila, one could say that in Arlt's later novels, a Nietzschean will to power manifests itself on the level of the author's style, which, by simulating the camera's non-personal way of registering reality, similarly dissolves authorial identity and autonomy in service of a sort of stylistic will to power.

monstrous value system, can be understood as a sort of mirror image of Silvio's fate. They too betray those closest to them, but their destiny is the exact opposite of Silvio's: they thrive in the heart of the very city in which Silvio can find no adequate place. In his novels, Arlt increasingly positions Hollywood cinema as the cultural form that has most comprehensively captured the imagination of the Argentine bourgeoisie: as he sees it, cinema has come to supplant theatre "en su función de Escuela Práctica de Vida," providing moviegoers with a vast wellspring of "[p]rocedimientos para mejor triunfar en la dirección de sus deseos" ("Roberto Arlt" 20). Perhaps, then, these characters, who systematically extend their knowledge of the procedures through which cinema works its magic to their own social relations, succeed precisely because they have learned how to exploit the potentialities of the art form that has come to dominate and shape the society that Arlt's novels denounce. If, as Elsa Drucaroff has argued, "la obra de Arlt es una utopía negativa … [donde no se] dibujan los proyectos de transformación de una sociedad sino la exacerbación atroz de sus mismos principios" (294), then cinema is perhaps best understood as the central cultural institution of this negative utopia. Those who are the most attuned to its power, such as the moviegoers discussed here, are those who are best equipped to succeed in this negative representation of Buenos Aires society.

Against his characters' use of cinema as a means of creatively manipulating those around them in order to satisfy their desires and fantasies, Arlt's far-reaching endeavor to simulate cinema's innovative techniques of visual representation stands out as an affirmative complement to his negative understanding of cinema's effect on his characters. For Arlt it is thus a question of how (and how not to) use cinema. His novels depict men and women who "cinematize" their lives, imitating the behaviors of screen actors and yearning for their lives to unfold in accordance with the narratives they consume in movie theaters. He condemns them for this, even if they

paradoxically encounter success. Meanwhile, his sophisticated deployment of cinematic techniques of representation implicitly voices what, for Arlt, is the right way to use cinema: in his journalistic articles on cinema he repeatedly insists that spectators should distance themselves from the dramatic content of films, instead focusing on the aesthetic value inherent in the cinematic form. By simulating cinema's artistry in the pages of his novels, Arlt practices what he preaches: he uses cinema the right way by maintaining this position of critical distance with regard to the human content of films. The ultimate aim of his use of cinematic Bovarism is to condemn the masses' simulation of the lives represented on screen, while at the same time Arlt, the novelist, simulates the camera's capacity to register modern life in exacting detail.

CONCLUSIONS: ARLT AND FLAUBERT; CINEMA, SIMULATION, AND MADNESS

Arlt's deployment of a cinematic style of representation, and his parallel condemnation of his characters' cinematic stylization of their lives, invites comparison with the 19th century novelist who, in many ways, inaugurated this strategy of pitting author against character in terms of their respective ways of using art: Gustave Flaubert. The idea of comparing Arlt to Flaubert is somewhat traditional in Argentine literary studies, as is evident in Piglia's comments on Arlt's social Bovarism cited above; however, it has been questioned by, among others, César Aira, who, in the essay cited above considers the comparison to be an inept one due to the gulf separating the mature, bourgeois Frenchman and the youthful, visionary Argentine, as well as the vast difference between their respective prose styles. The final section of this chapter proposes a rapprochement between the authors by extending Jacques Rancière's re-reading of Flaubert to the analysis of Arlt's treatment of cinema. Rancière's study of the dynamics of the relationship between the author and his most enduring character, Emma Bovary, provides a compelling

framework for understanding Arlt's treatment of cinema in terms of proper and improper, as well as healthy and unhealthy, ways of treating the relationship between art and life.

In programmatic monographs such as *Mute Speech* and *The Politics of Literature*, Rancière positions Flaubert as the author who unfolds some of the most significant potentialities of the aesthetic regime of art by developing an artistic program centered on the principle of style. Reading him in historical succession as following in the wake of Honoré de Balzac, Rancière proposes that Flaubert's novels introduce a radically new practice of description. Balzac uses description to present the reader with a series of signs inscribed on the people and things of a social world that, in Balzac's novels, becomes a vast web of hieroglyphs. These worldly hieroglyphs, reproduced in the novelist's prose language, promise to reveal the truth of society if deciphered properly. In Flaubert's novels, the author's focus shifts from the inscription of signs-to-be-deciphered to the registration of minute changes in intensity that take place at a pre-individual level. Flaubert accomplishes this shift by enacting an absolutization of the principle of style, conceived as an "absolute way of seeing things" (*Politics* 60) that aspires to transcend the Balzacian view of society as a system of decipherable signs. The years that separated Balzac and Flaubert witnessed a massive "hermeneutic profusion" (23) as the strategies employed by Balzac were deployed in an increasing number of social-and pop-scientific discourses that claimed to reveal the secret of society's functioning. Rancière reads Flaubert's novels as reacting to this fevered interest in deciphering signs: he insists on literature's difference from these social-scientific hermeneutics by shifting emphasis to the registration of "the breathing of things freed from the empire of meanings" (25). He thus aims to re-found literature's specificity by turning his back on symptomatic readings of society and instead seeking to "discover what impersonal, pre-individual forms of life [are] like" (60). Flaubert's novels, in other words, aspire to capture

"the molecular democracy of the state of things with no rhyme or reason" (26). Rancière's project positions Flaubert alongside philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Gilles Deleuze, all of whom, in distinct manners, sought to overcome the ontological primacy granted to the subject and her representations in the Cartesian philosophical tradition by plumbing "the great indeterminate depth that subtends the world of representation, beneath the principle of reason" (*Mute Speech* 120).

In many ways, it seems strange (if not absurd) to compare Arlt's style to that of Flaubert, which is famously based on the time-consuming, sentence-by-sentence labor of polishing prose language to effectively render the absolute way of seeing things pursued by the French author. As Arlt himself takes pains to point out, economic necessity forced him to write his novels at a hurried, chaotic pace that did not allow for the polished, perfected sort of prose he sees in his French predecessor. He sarcastically laments in the prologue to *Los lanzallamas,* "¡Cuántas veces he deseado trabajar una novela, que como las de Flaubert, se compusiera de panorámicos lienzos…!" (*Obras I*: 385-86), before proceeding to explain that "hoy, entre los ruidos de un edificio social que se desmorona inevitablemente, no es posible pensar en bordados" (386). Aira, building on Arlt's own distinction between aristocratic detachment and chaotic immersion in the noisy social edifice, re-frames the difference between the two authors in the following terms: "Flaubert se agota en la forma, Arlt nunca llega a la forma, se termina en lo formal … En Flaubert la narración infinita y torrencial de la novela primitiva cristaliza en forma artística autónoma [y en Arlt no]" (63). Flaubert's absolutization of style is, for Aira, a dead end: it crystallizes a vital impulse that for centuries had guided novelistic creation into petrified forms, or, as Arlt himself puts it, into "panorámicos lienzos." Aira's "formal/forma" distinction is meant

to clarify the way that Arlt's novels remain on the level of a perpetual "becoming," whereas Flaubert congeals this process into a formal, crystallized "being."

This, however, is precisely the interpretation of Flaubert that Rancière seeks to undermine. Against critics like Jean-Paul Sartre, who, like Aira, thought that Flaubert's intense attention to detail tended to petrify language by "remov[ing] words from their communicative uses" and immobilizing them in a "world of purified words conceived as a secret garden of precious stones and flowers" (*Politics* 8), Rancière recovers a Flaubert whose novels obsessively seek to *avoid* the crystallization of novelistic narration into petrified forms by registering an infinite torrent of micro-events, "these shells, these hairs or drops of water, to which we might add a few rays of sunlight, breaths of air, grains of sand or dust whipped up by the wind, [all of which] forms the fabric of [Flaubert's novels]" (*Politics* 61). For Rancière, Flaubert's unique contribution is precisely his insistence on remaining on the level of "lo formal." In this sense, the way that Arlt's writing captures what Sarlo describes as the "nuevo elenco de imágenes y percepciones [de la ciudad moderna]" (*Una modernidad periférica* 16) by bombarding the reader with cascades of sensory inputs in descriptive passages that aim to communicate the experience of urban life, demonstrates a surprising affinity with Flaubert's endeavor to register the pre-individual intensities of life. If in Arlt the drops of water and blades of sand of Flaubert's French countryside are replaced by flashes of neon lights, sparks produced by jackhammers working on the foundations of new skyscrapers, and fleeting glimpses of trees and rooftops viewed from the seats of a rapidly-moving train car, the two authors share a common objective: to maintain their writing on the level of "lo formal," as Aira puts it.

It will not be argued here that Arlt arrives at a Flaubertian "absolute way of seeing things" in reaction to an analogous proliferation of social-scientific discourses that required

literature to turn away from a hermeneutic manner of seeing the social world (although, in effect, early-20th-century Argentine society continued to participate in the same sort of fevered interest in interpretation that Rancière sees in 19th century France).[89] Rather, in line with the above reading of his novels, it seems that Arlt discovered the possibility of a stylistic absolute in the city's movie theaters, as he watched the films of Chaplin, Jannings, and others.[90] Arlt's fascination with cinema, and the distinction he repeatedly stresses between the "aficionados" capable of comprehending cinematic artistry and the "masses" who frequent movie theaters in search of escape from their everyday lives and intense sensorial pleasures, underscores the fact that, in cinema, Arlt encounters what might be thought of as his own experience of an absolute style. The movie camera's capacity to register minute details presents Arlt with an "absolute way of seeing things" that forms the starting point for a far-reaching investigation into the possibility of a prose style in which literary writing simulates the camera's capacity to capture modern reality. Thus, above and beyond distinctions based on the respective pace of production and degree of refinement of the two authors' prose, Flaubert and Arlt are motivated by a shared pursuit of a literary style that registers the sensorial experience of being in the world without crystallizing language into what Aira calls "formas."

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[89] See Oscar Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880-1910): Derivas de la "cultura científica"* for a study of sociological and other scientific discourses in early-20th-century Buenos Aires.

[90] This is not to say that Arlt's style is *entirely* attributable to his interaction with cinema; it was, of course, overdetermined by his extensive readings of the Euro-American novelistic tradition, with special emphasis placed on 19th century literary realism. As he emphasizes throughout his journalistic writings, he learned from the great realist novelists a mode of inhabiting the city and observing the lives of its residents, explaining over and over again that he admires their skillful treatment of the human content of their works. From Charles Dickens and Eça de Queirós he has learned that "si se aprende a mirar y luego se aprende a ver, el verdulero es tan interesante como la princesa" ("¡Con ésta van 365!" 133); Dostoyevsky, for his part, has taught him how to make visible the anguished reality of the men and women of his century, "[que] llevan en su interior un verdugo de sí mismo" ("*Los siete locos*" 141). In a sense, Arlt's novelistic project could be understood as an attempt to remain faithful to literary realism at a time when its core representational strategies had lost their vitality. The challenge faced by Arlt had to do with finding an appropriate form for representing the lives of 20th-century city dwellers; this paper argues that in cinema he finds the initial inspiration for what might be thought of as a formal revolution enacted *within* the realist paradigm, an idea which is in line with many recent attempts to re-think the relation between Arlt's novels and realism. For a helpful discussion of this relation, see Analía Capdevila, "Las novelas de Arlt: Un realismo para la modernidad."

There is, of course, a second sense in which, as critics have recognized for decades, both authors are quite similar: their novelistic investigations of what in the decades separating Flaubert from Arlt would come to be known as bovarism, that is, the manner in which the fictions that individuals consume come to exercise a primordial influence over their actions and behaviors. In this light, a supplementary essay on Flaubert by Rancière titled "The Putting to Death of Emma Bovary: Literature, Democracy and Medicine" is of special interest. It argues that Emma Bovary must commit suicide at the end of *Madame Bovary*, *not* due to reasons internal to the plot (she was drowning in debts, her husband would have discovered her affairs), *nor* due to external, sociopolitical factors (women in provincial France had limited opportunity to live the sorts of lives Emma aspires to lead), but instead, and primarily, because she embodies a competing "absolutization" of style that the author (Flaubert) aims to condemn through her exemplary death. Emma Bovary, in short, seeks to "absolutize" the style of life depicted in the novels she reads by fashioning her world after the world represented in the novels, thus blurring the distinction between art and life and making both operate according to a single "aesthetic" principle of style. Life should become art, in her eyes, and "that is Emma's mistake, her sin against art. We can give it a name: the aestheticization of daily life" (*Politics* 57). Flaubert, on the other hand, aims to harden the line between life and literature, seeking to reestablish the specificity of art through the principle of style as an absolute, impersonal way of seeing things. Emma thus dies, in Rancière's reading, due to what might be thought of as literary-political reasons: the author, Flaubert, enacts a particular politics of literature based on the meticulous registration of the pre-individual intensities of the world his characters inhabits, while Emma elaborates a competing politics of literature through her "aestheticism." As Rancière concludes,

"[l]iterature has to put her to death to preserve art from its malevolent double, the aestheticization of life" (*Politics* 59).

Rancière situates Emma Bovary' life and death in the overarching context of a generalized 19th-century democratization of access to cultural goods, as well as a particular confluence of medical and sociological discourses that allowed experts from a variety of disciplines, from the human sciences to literature, to treat society on the model of the medical patient, elaborating pathologies of modern society and proposing cures for perceived sicknesses ravaging the social body. The growth in access to cultural goods had tended to put "all images, all dreams and all aspirations at the disposal of anybody and everybody" (*Politics* 52), causing individuals such as Emma Bovary to feel an intense desire to enjoy the "ideal pleasures" associated with the consumption of art. The problem, for authors such as Flaubert, was that most people seemed to want to enjoy art in an unhealthy way. Such is the case with Emma, who seeks to blend the ideal pleasures of art with the physical pleasures of the body and spends her time "negotiating between excitations of the senses and those of the mind" (*Politics* 53).

This use of art as a source of physical excitement is precisely that of the moviegoers Arlt studies in both his novels and his newspaper columns: they, like Emma, seek to transfer the ideal pleasures of cinematic art (which, as Arlt argues in his newspaper columns, should ideally be *contemplative* in nature) into physical pleasures, "vivi[endo] en su sensibilidad un trozo de existencia de los personajes de sombra que gozan o sufren" ("Roberto Arlt" 20). Authors such as Flaubert (and Arlt) pathologize this blurring of the boundary between ideal and material pleasures, conceiving it as a disease which, in the last instance, has to do with the wrong interpretation of life. As Rancière puts it, the pleasures that Emma Bovary transfers from literature to life "must be referred back to a single principle—the wrong interpretation of

sensation[s] … The principle of poor health is their solidification into objects of desire and love—and so, into causes of suffering" (*Politics* 67). To combat this "pathological" mixing of aesthetic and physical pleasures, authors such as Flaubert and Arlt join the ranks of "the great tumult of doctors of every stripe bending over the great disease that modern society and the individuals in it suffer from" (*Politics* 67), proposing specifically literary cures. Both Flaubert's condemnation of Emma Bovary's mixing of ideal and carnal pleasures, and Arlt's critical stance concerning the way that moviegoers derive intense physical pleasures from their cinematic experiences, identify this process of "solidifying" the objects of their desire as the heart of the problem with the general public's use of art. And, finally, both authors recur to the principle of literary style (even if Arlt presents his style as an "anti-style") to support what they conceive as the correct way of interpreting sensations.

Rancière's reading of *Madame Bovary* culminates in his linking of Emma's wrong interpretation of sensations to emergent 19th-century discourses on hysteria, explaining that the "great disease" diagnosed by Flaubert and others "is called democracy, it is called excitement; but, more and more commonly, it is given a scientific name as well: it is called 'hysteria'" (*Politics* 68). As the term "hysteria" passed through scientific and literary discourses toward its eventual place in psychoanalytic theory, the predominant usage came to designate "the way bodies suffer from an illness that doesn't have an organic cause but is induced by an excess of thought" (68). In Emma's case, the sensory excitement caused by her use of literature—her desire to possess a life like those that unfold in the novels she reads—marks her as a "hysteric" in precisely this sense: an excess of thought caused by access to serial novels induces a corporeal "illness" for which, at the novel's end, she pays with her life. Flaubert, in turn, uses the fiction of the hysteric to propose a literary cure: instead of solidifying sensations into personal objects of

desire, the author maintains the sensorial micro-events of life at a pre-personal level, "weav[ing] the web of tangible impersonal life from them" (63). As Rancière concludes, this "cure" bears a remarkable resemblance to schizophrenia, the disease that was theorized in the 19th century as the opposite of hysteria: "The literary cure offered by Flaubert … gives the writer doctor a status we might call that of the healthy schizophrenic" (63). The sort of literary schizophrenia proposed by Flaubert is "healthy" in the sense that it is circumscribed to the space of literature, which is, in turn, rigorously separated from the author's everyday life: "[Flaubert] releases the whirlwinds and the rippling waves of impersonal, pre-individual life. But he doesn't let them dissociate him from himself" (69). The fiction of the hysteric thus allows Flaubert to re-ground literature according to a principle of style that comes to resemble nothing other than a paradoxical schizophrenic literary health.

As the above analysis has sought to illustrate, it is also quite appropriate to speak of Arlt's treatment of moviegoers in terms of a certain pathologization of film spectatorship. His characters, like Emma, solidify the sensations caused by film in pursuit of a life that unfolds "como en los desenvolvimientos de las películas norteamericanas" (*Obras I*: 164), and when they are caught up in particularly "cinematic" moments, they experience a mixture of ideal and corporeal pleasure. However, while Arlt was at least passingly familiar with the psychoanalytic literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such that many of his characters could be interpreted as "hysterical" descendants of Emma Bovary, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider his investigation of "pathological" uses of cinema in the context of two terms that are central to both his novelistic project and early-20th-century sociological discourse in Argentina. The first of these terms, perhaps unsurprisingly, is *madness*: as is evidenced in the title of his second novel, *Los siete locos*, Arlt demonstrates an increasing interest in the behavior of the men

and women he describes in a column accompanying the publication of that novel as "desorientado[s] y locoide[s]" ("*Los siete locos"* 140). In that column, Arlt manifests a clear tendency to occupy the position of "author-doctor" described by Rancière in the context of 19th century literary treatments of hysteria. He explains that the characters of his novel are "individuos y mujeres de esta ciudad, a quienes yo he conocido" (139), and he approximates the role of doctor submitting his patients to treatment by explaining that "estos individuos no me son simpáticos. Pero los he tratado … porque ellos llevaban en sí verdades atroces que merecían ser conocidas" (141). Over the course of his final three novels, Arlt elaborates a study of diverse character types that, in general terms, could be grouped under the general category of "madness." As Masotta puts it, "[l]os personajes de Arlt son perfectos psicópatas y/o psicóticos … [y también] se podría diagnosticar[los] como esquizofrénicos e histéricos" (74, footnote). Rather than drawing distinctions by sorting his characters into distinct categories of mental illness, it seems most adequate to remain within the general category of madness or *locura*: for Arlt, his characters, including the moviegoers studied here, are interesting subjects for literary treatment precisely because they manifest diverse symptoms of mental illness that he attributes not only to possible clinical conditions but to a diffuse state of social despair linked to the historical conditions of the 1920s; the way in which World War I and the Russian Revolution, among other epochal events, have "revolucionado la conciencia de los hombres, dejándolos vacíos de ideales y esperanzas" ("*Los siete locos*" 139).

The second term is *simulation*, a concept found in a series of key sociological texts from early 20th century Argentina, such as José Ingenieros's *La simulación en la lucha por la vida* (1903) and José María Ramos Mejía's *Los simuladores del talento en la lucha por la personalidad y la vida* (1904). As the titles of both works indicate, these authors situate their

analyses of simulation, taken as an integral component of modern social existence, within a social-Darwinist understanding of human society as a vast "struggle for life" in which modern individuals are fatally trapped. As Josefina Ludmer explains, concern with simulation in Argentina arises in the context of social modernization and the consequent aspiration to comprehend the differences existing on the interior of modern, liberal societies: simulation can be thought of as the privileged object of a liberalism obsessed with double identities, in that it can be taken to constitute a "delito de la verdad" (123) that relies on falsification and fraud to generate the appearance of the attributes that the simulating individual is purportedly lacking. For authors such as Ramos Mejía and Ingenieros, simulation, conceived broadly as the use of fraudulent or deceptive means of advancing in life, rises to prominence as the central manner of struggling for life in the context of the progressive diminution of the physical or violent means of struggle that were characteristic of so-called primitive human societies. In modern societies, as Ingenieros puts it, "'saber vivir' equivale 'saber simular'" (97).

The relation between the sociological works of Ramos Mejía and Ingenieros and the theatrical works Arlt wrote during the 1930s has formed the basis for multiple scholarly analyses in recent years. I would argue, however, that it can also be traced back across his entire novelistic corpus.[91] Lucio, for example, repeatedly references "[l]a *struggle for life*" (129) in his conversation with Silvio in *El juguete rabioso*, and Estanislao Balder, in his analysis of Buenos Aires society, elaborates a diverse panorama of tactics of simulation employed by young men and, especially, young women in order to contract matrimony and thus "constitu[ir] hogares basados en mentiras permanentes" (695).[92] When Balder ultimately links the behaviors of these

[91] See, for example, Laura Juárez, *Arlt en los años treinta*, and Horacio González, "Simulación y metamorfosis en el teatro de Roberto Arlt."

[92] Arlt shares with Ramos Mejía and Ingenieros an essentially sexist conception of human behavior in which women, as the "weaker sex," must resort to fraudulent means of achieving success in life with a much greater

young people to their exposure to North American cinema, he thus underscores the link between cinema and simulation that Arlt has progressively elaborated over the course of his four novels.[93]

Framing Arlt's uses of cinema in terms of madness and simulation allows for a surprising rapprochement of Arlt's novels with the work of Ingenieros in particular. Both Ingenieros and Arlt share an initial presupposition that society is grounded in fiction: Ingenieros describes society as "ese mundo de ficción y de mentira, en que todos, buenos y malos, se ven obligados a simular" (32), while Piglia explains that, for Arlt, "la sociedad está trabajada por la ficción, se asienta en la ficción" (*Crítica y ficción* 25). In his studies of simulation, Ingenieros produces a typology of "simuladores" that, in broad strokes, is applicable to the cast of characters that make up Arlt's novels: his initial distinction between "simuladores producidos por el medio" and "simuladores natos" (127), for example, allows for an understanding of the behavior of characters like Gregorio Barsut and Estanislao Balder in terms of their "tendencias congénitas" (127) toward simulation. Additionally, the other key concept toward which Ingenieros' studies of simulation gravitate, *locura*, opens up various possibilities for re-interpreting Arlt's characters (especially those that grace the pages of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*) according to Ingenieros's understanding of various types of "simuladores patológicos" (151), from the suggestionable Erdosain to the psychopathic Astrologer, who bears a striking similarity to an acquaintance of Ingenieros described in *La simulación en la lucha por la vida*. Ingenieros

frequency than men. As Ingenieros puts it, as he describes the "tendencia general de la mujer a la simulación": "[d]e su tendencia al fraude, sólo diremos que estando la mujer excluida por la naturaleza del uso de algunos medios violentos de lucha, encuéntrase obligada a perfeccionarse en los medios fraudulentos. El hombre dispone de la fuerza; la mujer de la astucia" (76).

[93] It is not coincidental that Balder connects the exact moment when young couples begin down the path to their frequentation of movie theaters, conceived in the following quote as dens of illicit behavior: "[u]n día cualquiera, estas muchachas manoseadas en interminables sesiones de cine, masturbadas por sí mismas y lost distintos novios que tuvieron, 'contraían enlace' con un imbécil. Éste a su vez había engañado, manoseado, y masturbado a distintas jovencitas, idénticas a la que ahora se casaba con él" (*Obras I*: 695).

describes an "enfermo de neurasthenia cerebral" (154) who, among other extraordinary simulations, endeavored to:

> convertirse en cerebro y brazo de una terrible asociación secreta, cuyo nombre envidiárale cualquier delirante sistematizado: 'Liga Americana de la Democracia pura'; consiguió iniciar a varios jóvenes en los misterios de la sociedad, consagrándolos reformadores sociales y profetas del americanismo. (155)

The content of the Astrologer's society is markedly different from the combination of democracy, social reform, and Americanism described here, but the form of the plot traced by Ingenieros is remarkably similar to that of *Los siete locos*, as is the "delirious" nature of a leader who, in Arlt's novel, dreams of initiating the crazed and disenchanted masses into his society and becoming a "manager de locos … de los desequilibrados que no tienen entrada en los centros espiritistas y bolcheviques" (*Obras I*: 278). In sum, the respective projects of Ingenieros and Arlt—sociological in the case of the former, novelistic in the case of the latter—share remarkable affinities in their shared concern with simulation and madness as keys for comprehending the workings of modern society.

Ingenieros does not address the effect that emergent mass cultural forms have had on the individuals he studies in *La simulación en la lucha por la vida*. Arlt's novels, which build in turn on his journalistic investigations of how moviegoers aspire to simulate the behaviors (and career paths) of the Hollywood stars they see on screen, can thus be taken as an extension of Ingenieros's early-20th-century investigations of simulation to the context of modern mass culture, and especially to Hollywood cinema, which Arlt increasingly understood as perhaps *the* most powerful source of new models for simulation. As he sees it, moviegoers are captivated by the figures of stars such as Rudolph Valentino and Greta Garbo, and when they leave the theater,

they endeavor to simulate the behaviors and mannerisms of the actors they see on screen. Throughout his writings, Ingenieros consistently imagined a future in which the need to simulate would be largely superseded due to the advent of "nuevos regímenes de organización social" that will attenuate the conflicts at the heart of capitalist society such that "la simulación, como todos los medios de lucha, se atenuará progresivamente, perdiendo su utilidad" (42). For Arlt, on the other hand, as Horacio González explains in a study of simulation in his works of theatre, "no puede dejar de haber simulación" (31). Rather than postulating a utopian future in which *vivir* will cease to be synonymous with *simular*, Arlt's novels study what he sees as a veritable explosion of simulation at the heart of modern society, caused primarily by the spectacular emergence of cinema.[94]

There is one additional point of connection between Arlt and Ingenieros, which concerns Ingenieros's defense of *artistic* simulation as a mode of simulation that, due to its detachment from everyday life, escapes the logic of simulation that forms the subject of his sociological investigations. While Ingenieros is primarily concerned with theatre, and the dramatic performance of actors whom he calls "simuladores profesionales" (129), his words apply equally well to Arlt's novelistic simulation of cinema's techniques of visual representation. For Ingenieros, although actors simulate the behaviors of others on stage, "en realidad, no hay simulación en este caso" because, as he goes on to explain, their simulation is "convencional y sólo tiene finalidades estéticas, ajenas a todo engaño utilitario" (129). Any possibility of confusing the simulator (the actor) and the simulated (the character represented) is suppressed by

[94] González explains that the conception of character that Arlt proposes in his fictional corpus (including both his novels and the plays he wrote in the 1930s) is based on an understanding of human identity as a groundless and continual process of metamorphosis: as González puts it, "esa metamorfosis [que caracteriza los personajes de Arlt] no se produce 'en' un personaje, sino que los personajes 'son' esa metamorfosis" (32). While this chapter largely concurs with González's understanding of simulation in Arlt, it also proposes the possibility that, for Arlt, literature comes to constitute a realm in which the author can practice a "healthy" form of simulation.

"un acuerdo previo entre el artista y su público" (129). By clearly demarcating the stage as a realm of art that is categorically distinct from the realm of everyday life, Ingenieros argues that professional actors are distinct from the simulating masses, and unworthy of inclusion in his analysis of simulation. Arlt the novelist relies on precisely this sort of demarcation, which he sketches in his bifurcated journalistic analyses of film spectatorship, to justify his deployment of cinematic techniques of representation in his novels. If his characters are bad, and indeed mentally infirm, due to their tendency to simulate the behaviors they see on movie screens, Arlt implicitly defends his "cinematization" of literary prose by relying on the same understanding of simulation as Ingenieros: artistic simulation, if it remains on the level of aesthetic form without falling to the level of "fines utilitarios," is not really simulation at all. In this light, one could say that Arlt treats cinema, not as an "Escuela Práctica de Vida" (that would be exactly the wrong way of doing so), but instead as an "Escuela Práctica de *Arte*" where the writer, maintaining the disinterested gaze of the "aficionado," can learn lessons in cinematic artistry that he will then translate from the visual medium of cinema to the textual medium of the novel. Thus, in an analogous fashion to Flaubert's formulation of a "healthy" literary schizophrenia, Arlt's novels propose a "healthy" practice of simulation as a means of extending cinema's revolutionary techniques of visual representation to the realm of literature.

Chapter 3: *Los dos Piglias*: From a Revolutionary Avant-Garde to a "Postmodern" Conspiracy

Roberto Arlt died young, in 1942, and Macedonio Fernández followed him in death a decade later. The years following both authors' deaths, however, saw the spectacular rebirth of their works in Argentine and Latin American literary studies. Arlt's novels were reprinted by the prestigious Editorial Losada in the 1950s and 60s, and Macedonio's *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* was published for the first time by another major Buenos Aires press, Centro Editor, in 1967. Publication of Macedonio's *Obras completas*, compiled and edited by his son, Adolfo de Obieta, began seven years later. Due in part to the increasingly broad circulation of their texts, younger generations of scholars and intellectuals produced innovative re-readings of both authors' works, often supported by new currents in theoretical discourse that allowed for new understandings of both authors' projects. At the same time, the editorial and critical success of the Latin American literary "Boom" allowed for the retrospective canonization of Arlt and Macedonio as rediscovered precursors to the new novels of the 60s. This in turn provided the impetus for additional re-editions and new editions of the authors' works, such as the 1993 critical edition of Macedonio's *Museo* cited in Chapter 1 and multiple major collections of the daily newspaper columns Arlt published in *El Mundo* beginning in the late 1920s.[95] Together, these developments led to what David William Foster refers to as a "geometric growth in scholarship" on Arlt and Macedonio. Writing in 1979, Foster speaks of an unparalleled increase in attention shown to both authors in the field of Latin American literary studies, explaining that

[95] Among many recent reprints of Arlt's *aguafuertes*, many of them compiled by theme (such as his notes on cinema compiled in *Notas sobre el cinematógrafo* and his travel writings on his time in Brazil in *Aguafuertes cariocas*), two editions in particular stand out: the second volume of Arlt's *Obras* (1997), which compiles many of his columns from the years during which he published his four novels, and *El Paisaje en las nubes: Crónicas en* El Mundo *1937-1942*, which includes 236 columns published during the last years of his life.

they are now seen as "pivotal figures in the literary tradition that has come down to us since the vanguard" (100).

Ricardo Piglia is undoubtedly one of, if not *the* central figure in this boom in scholarship. A lifelong reader of both authors' works, his reflections on their legacies have produced provocative theses about each author's place in the modern tradition, contributed to major scholarly projects on Arlt and Macedonio, and opened up significant new lines of inquiry regarding their place in national, regional, and global literary contexts. Piglia has identified imaginative and original ways to harmonize the works of both authors with major currents in modern literary theory and criticism, situating and re-situating them in a historical flow of ideas and texts that crosses national boundaries and academic disciplines. In Piglia's hands, Arlt's analysis of the material bases of literary production in 1920s Buenos Aires flows into a tradition of critical theory that leads from post-Revolutionary Russia and Weimar Germany, to the South American cities where Europeans exiled by the events of the Second World War made their new homes, to a late-century cultural context characterized by the epochal shifts brought about by military dictatorships in Argentina and other Southern Cone nations, as well as the subsequent emergence of neoliberal models of democratic governance. Macedonio's understanding of the relation between literature and thought, for its part, becomes identical, through a subtle act of plagiarism, to that encountered by Maurice Blanchot in the writings of the foundational modernist writer Robert Musil.[96]

[96] In "Las perplejidades de un lector modelo: Ensayo y ficción en Ricardo Piglia," Alberto Giordano points to a short essay by Piglia titled "Notas sobre literatura en un diario," which contains the following fragment, attributed to the character Emilio Renzi: "¿Cuál es el problema mayor del arte de Macedonio? La relación del pensamiento con la literatura. Le parece posible que en una obra puedan expresarse pensamientos tan difíciles y de forma tan abstracta como en una obra filosófica, pero a condición de que *todavía* no estén pensados. Este 'todavía no,' dice Renzi, es la literatura misma" (qtd. in "Las perplejidades" 3). The words are in fact lifted from Blanchot's *El libro que vendrá*, where Blanchot explains that Musil "concibe que en una obra literaria puedan expresarse pensamientos tan difíciles y de forma tan abstracta como en una obra filosófica, pero a condición de que *todavía* no estén pensados. Este

Piglia's critical re-readings of both authors, in turn, flow into works of fiction in which he resurrects both authors in order to elaborate imaginative representations of projects that Arlt and Macedonio might have secretly undertaken in the later years of their lives. The notes for a novel written by Arlt that appear in "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" are one such example. Another is the storytelling machine invented by Macedonio that is at the center of Piglia's second novel, *La ciudad ausente*. Through his fictions, as well as his critical essays, Piglia repeatedly asks, as Idelber Avelar puts it, what it means "to make of Macedonio Fernández and Roberto Arlt the two major pillars of the modern in Argentine fiction" (86). The responses he formulates across his decades-long literary project have gained an increasingly hegemonic status in the critical literature on both authors and have reimagined their place in Argentine, Latin American, and global literary traditions.[97] To read Arlt and Macedonio today is to read them through Piglia. Moreover, the intensity of Piglia's interaction with both authors also obliges his readers to repeatedly filter his texts back through those of his predecessors in a constant process of questioning, as Avelar puts it, "[w]hat is the syntax of Piglia's appropriation of these signatures?" (86). The nature or identity of Piglia's texts is not founded in some ideal combination of attributes possessed by the texts themselves, but in the relation, and chains of relations, they establish with other texts. Those relations, among the texts of Arlt, Macedonio, and Piglia, form the subject of this chapter.

'todavía no es la literatura misma…" (qtd. in "Las perplejidades" 4). In a later text titled "Notas sobre Macedonio en un diario," Piglia alters the original quote to read that a novel can express thoughts as difficult and abstract as in philosophical works, "'pero a condición de que parezcan falsos. Esa ilusión de falsedad,' dice Renzi, 'es la literatura misma'" (qtd. in "Las perplejidades" 5). The link between literature and falsification will be discussed at length in the following pages discussing Piglia's re-reading of Arlt; for now, the mechanism of linkage, where Macedonio is linked to Musil, and Renzi to Blanchot, bears emphasizing. This chapter will culminate in a study of a similar process of linkage in Piglia's second novel, *La ciudad ausente*, which connects Macedonio to Friedrich Nietzsche, and Piglia to Pierre Klossowski.

[97] To cite just one small piece of evidence of the success of Piglia's endeavor, one could say that is in no small part thanks to Piglia if today you can purchase a cup of coffee at the Café Macedonio on the front lawn of the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires.

As was the case for Macedonio Fernández in chapter 1, the case will be made here that two distinct projects traverse the literary production of Ricardo Piglia. The first of these projects, which revolves around a rigorous re-reading of the works of Roberto Arlt, will be approached via a heading that is also the title of a book of essays by Italian poet Edoardo Sanguineti that was translated in part by Piglia in the early-1970s: "*Por una vanguardia revolucionaria*." In the early years of Piglia's career, the problem facing young, politically-radical writers such as himself was that too many intellectuals, even those who touted their revolutionary credentials and participated in the political upheavals of the 1960s and 70s, still clung to the same old liberal-humanist notions of literature as an autonomous product of the human spirit. Piglia endeavors to explode this understanding of literature by inaugurating a revolutionarily *post*-autonomous literature, that is, a literature capable of rising from the ruins of a modern literary institution that is grounded in the notion of autonomy.

I argue that this revolutionary project reaches its farthest consequences in Piglia's re-reading of Arlt within a Marxist tradition that re-conceives the artist as a producer and situates artistic production in heteronomous relation with general social production. While Piglia's aim is to annihilate any and all vestiges of idealist conceptions of literature as an autonomous realm of spiritual activity, I demonstrate that this project nonetheless culminates in a renewed thought of autonomy. Following the work of Bertolt Brecht, Louis Althusser, Alain Badiou, and other Marxist intellectuals, Piglia's "Homenaje" arrives at an understanding of literature as capable of marking a certain critical distance, or autonomy, with respect to the ideological frameworks that individuals use to relate to the real conditions of their lives. If, for Althusser and his peers, there is no escaping ideology, such that life as it is experienced by individuals simply *is* the imaginary, ideological relationship that individuals establish with reality, then it follows that art is

absolutely permeated with ideology, as everything in the work has been filtered through the ideological gaze of its producer or creator. Yet, importantly, Piglia follows Althusser in his understanding that art is also capable of occupying a position of critical distance, or autonomy, on the interior of this ideologically-saturated landscape, allowing the viewer or reader to step back and "see" or "perceive" the ideological processes that shape one's relationship to reality. Works of art, in the Althusserian formula toward which Piglia's early essays and fictions increasingly point, "dan una 'vista' de la ideología a la que la obra no deja de hacer alusión y de la que no cesa de nutrirse, una vista que supone un *retroceso*, una *toma de distancia interior* sobre la ideología misma de la que han surgido" (86). In the following pages, I demonstrate that Piglia's pursuit of a revolutionary avant-garde culminates in this understanding of art's capacity of producing an internal displacement with respect to ideology.

The second project, which I study in terms of Piglia's development of a "postmodern" theory of the conspiracy, inverts the terms of the first by using as its starting point the necessity of defending a certain understanding of autonomy.[98] It does this in the wake of the epochal shift associated not only with the military dictatorship in Argentina and the subsequent transition to neoliberal democracy, but also with the emergence in critical discourse of discussions of postmodernism as a new cultural dominant. In contrast to the 1960s and 70s, when Piglia could continue to attack his peers for being all too bourgeois in their literary practices, by the 1980s the problem was increasingly that nobody on the left seemed to believe in those hallowed notions of

[98] I set the word "postmodern" in quotations throughout to underline the fact that, while Piglia occasionally refers to the discourse of the postmodern in his reflections on the conspiracy, he does not explicitly situate his own positions regarding literature and conspiracy within a "postmodernist" conceptual framework. In existing scholarship, it is conventional to refer to his work in this period within the conceptual framework of the post-*dictatorship* (see especially Avelar, 1999). The term "postmodern" is preferred here due to its reference to the global (rather than strictly national) nature of the epochal shift that separates the two stages in Piglia's literary project. For a discussion of how the Argentine dictatorship and the subsequent transition to democracy fits into this global shift, see below, pp. 214-219.

literature anymore. In a cultural landscape in which, as Josefina Ludmer (one of Piglia's most illustrious co-conspirators) famously put it in a manifesto published many years later, "todo lo cultural (y literario) es económico y todo lo económico es cultural (y literario)" ("Literaturas postautónomas"), to go on attacking literature's autonomy would have been akin to beating a dead horse. [99] In this emergent "postmodern" context, I argue that Piglia inaugurates a second stage of his literary project by re-inscribing certain minor notions of autonomy, such as the autonomy of fictions with respect to political discourse, and the fraught autonomy of language with respect to bodily affects, into the center of his approach to literature. He groups these notions under the general heading of the conspiracy. The conspiracy, for Piglia, emerges as a ready-made device capable of generating a standpoint for writing fictions that maintain a degree of critical distance from the machinations of the political and the economic spheres of society. This conspiracy theory is valid precisely because these spheres aspire to conjure away conspiratorial secrets in order to universalize the dreams of total transparency that drive both liberal and totalitarian political models.

[99] The sense of an epochal transition, and of the death of the revolutionary project of Piglia's younger years, is clearly communicated in a passage from the third and final volume of Piglia's recently-published *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi*. Marking the year 1982 as a moment of "cierre y de cambio de época" (159), Emilio Renzi, Piglia's oft-used pseudonym and literary alter ego, goes on to explain that the year not only marked a new chapter in his life story, but was also notable for "el viraje [que] se había producido en lo real." He goes on to explain this break with the past in the following terms: "Se había terminado una época en la que una realidad mejor era posible, una época en que él [Renzi] y sus amigos vivían en una sociedad paralela, un mundo propio, ajeno a la corriente principal de la cultura argentina. Habían vencido porque seguían vivos y combatían, pero también habían sido derrotados, tenían en el cuerpo las cicatrices y las marcas, eran sobrevivientes, eran heridos de guerra. Las ilusiones eran *ahora*, subrayó, más ilusas que nunca, pero la vida social y política era *ahora* más benigna que nunca … *Ahora*, subrayó, después de la derrota, todos habían vuelto al redil, todos *ahora* eran escritores oficiales, reconocidos, recibían premios y eran entrevistados en la televisión … Antes, pensaba Renzi, podíamos circular en los márgenes ligados a la contracultura, al mundo subterráneo del arte y la literatura, pero *ahora* todos éramos figuritas de un escenario empobrecido y debíamos jugar el juego que dominaba el mundo. No había ni esperanza ni voluntad ni coraje para cambiar las cosas o, al menos, para correr el riesgo de vivir de las ilusiones" (159; emphasis in original). The implications of this realization that, as of 1982, it was no longer possible to inhabit a "parallel society" enjoying partial autonomy with respect to the principal current of cultural life will be discussed in greater detail in the opening pages of the following chapter, via a discussion of the emergence of postmodernist discourse in the 1970s and 80s.

This chapter frames its study of these two projects around a pair of elements that function as the motors driving these returns to Arlt and Macedonio: a technique and a plot. From Arlt's writings of the 1920s and 30s, Piglia unearths a multifaceted technique of plagiarism that he deploys in order to lay bare the fact that the bourgeois notion of private property, which underpins modern social relations in their totality, has also secretly underwritten the historical project of modern literature from its 18th-and-19th-century roots. Piglia sees that the way Arlt appropriates materials from the bad translations of Russian novels that circulated in Buenos Aires allows for a retrospective re-reading of the Argentine literary tradition. This reading situates the faulty citation of a French phrase quoted by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in the opening epigraph of *Facundo* as the disavowed originary moment of a national tradition constructed on a foundation of thefts, falsifications, and plagiarisms. As Jorge Fornet explains, Piglia not only sees that a large part of the Argentine tradition has been built on these acts of literary appropriation, but he intuits that "la historia de esa[s] tendencia[s] es en buena medida la historia misma de la literatura nacional" (133). Literature, rather than constituting the spiritual patrimony of the Argentine Republic (the authentic "property" of the nation and its people), is revealed in Arlt's writings (and, retrospectively, all the way back to Sarmiento's *Facundo*) as an instrument of class domination in which intellectual property has been accumulated via historical processes of literary expropriation and accumulation. Having unearthed this critical practice of citation in his early essays on Arlt, Piglia employs it as the central textual *dispositif* driving his first major work, the two-part text titled "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt." As Bruno Bosteels puts it in his study of the "Homenaje," Piglia's techniques of falsification aim to do nothing less than "[attack] the very principle of the private appropriation of the written … [and] annihilate the foundation that has been the basis of aesthetic judgment throughout modernity" (212).

In his re-reading of Macedonio Fernández, in turn, Piglia encounters a plot—the conspiracy plot—that allows him to reassert the autonomy of literature in light of the epochal changes wrought by the totalitarian regime in Argentina and the subsequent resurgence of neoliberal democracy. Literature, in this reading, is defined as the production of fictions which, due to their fundamentally impossible or utopian nature, constitute a perpetual excess with respect to the political foundations of modern societies. Piglia views politics, and especially the liberal model of politics that dominates political systems throughout the west, as a fundamentally realist practice, an "arte de lo posible" (*Crítica* 123) in which society expresses itself through the prior delimitation of a shared reality, the contours of which are then debated and agreed upon through parliamentary processes of consensus, deal-making, and open debate. Literature, in contrast, "no expresa a ninguna sociedad sino como negación y contrarrealidad" (123). Its autonomy with respect to politics makes it an essentially utopian practice that by its nature resists the liberal drive to consensus: "Si la política es el arte de lo posible, el arte del punto final, la literatura es su antítesis. Nada de pactos, ni transacciones, la única verdad no es la realidad. Frente a la lengua vigilante de la *real-politik*, la voz argentina de Macedonio Fernández" (123). When in a key essay titled "Ficción y política en la literatura argentina," which was originally delivered as a conference presentation at Yale University in 1987, Piglia asserts that Macedonio Fernández "encarna, antes que nadie (y en secreto) la autonomía plena de la ficción en la literature argentina" (122), the word "autonomy" is deployed in this context. It is this prior assertion of autonomy—a conceptual definition of literature based in the autonomy of fiction vis-à-vis "realist" political activity—that Piglia uses as the starting point for his second novel, *La ciudad ausente* (1992).

Piglia's reflections on the conspiracy stretch from a series of essays, interviews, and lectures delivered over the course of the 1980s, to *La ciudad ausente*, to his 2002 essay *Teoría del complot*, which synthesizes his previous work on the conspiracy-form and highlights its centrality to his understanding of the historical project of the avant-garde, which Piglia defines as a broad-based political and artistic conspiracy against liberal modernity. In this chapter I show that his theory of the conspiracy is grounded in the complex historical dialogue he establishes between the two figures who, in Piglia's eyes, become the inaugural conspirators of the avant-garde tradition: Friedrich Nietzsche and Macedonio Fernández. By focusing on Piglia's dialogue with French philosopher Pierre Klossowski, whose 1969 monograph *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* identifies the conspiracy as one of the central (and hitherto unrecognized) components of Nietzsche's philosophical project, I illustrate how in the pages of his second novel Piglia secretly aligns Nietzsche and Macedonio's respective visions of modernity under the sign of the conspiracy. With one small exception, the dialogue between Piglia and Klossowski has been completely overlooked in existing scholarship.[100] By highlighting the centrality of Klossowski's thought in Piglia's "postmodern" reflections on literature, this chapter offers an original reading of the theoretical underpinnings of Piglia's fictions, and sheds important new light on his re-reading of the Argentine tradition.

In general, the critical literature has tended to assimilate the two projects distinguished here, the Arltian project for a revolutionary avant-garde and the Macedonian project for a "postmodern" conspiracy, into a single entity, emphasizing continuities between the subversive practices of citation developed by Piglia over the course of the 1970s, and his later reliance on

[100] The exception is a footnote that appears in Bosteels' *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, which acknowledges that "[t]he key to Piglia's view [on the conspiracy], however, can be found in the notion of the complot as a combat against culture, which he derives from Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*" (274). Bosteels does not elaborate on this point in the body of his text.

the conspiracy as a narrative form. David Kelman, for example, highlights how both projects can be understood in terms of a common horizon in which a performative theory of writing as constitutive of power fully subsumes the Latin American intellectual into the power structures of the lettered city. The guiding question for Piglia then becomes, "[h]ow to write *politically* when to write at all is to inscribe oneself within the totalizing relations of this *polis*" (165). For Kelman, Piglia's first response passes through the techniques of falsification that Piglia discovers in his re-reading of Arlt, then proceeds to "generaliz[e] this Arlt-effect" (167) and put it in the service of the Macedonian storytelling machine depicted in *La ciudad ausente*. By distinguishing between the two horizons proposed here, that of the revolutionary avant-garde and that of the "postmodern" conspiracy, I propose that these two projects are not necessarily assimilable into a single, overarching whole, and that they don't necessarily "understand" each other in their objectives. The concluding section of this chapter returns to the notion of autonomy in order to flesh out one important disagreement between the two, which has to do with a question of timing. In the first Piglia, the autonomy of the work of art comes last, as a sort of aftereffect of the artist's elaboration of the ideological materials out of which the work is composed. In the second Piglia, in contrast, the staking out of a conspiratorial position within the social field comes first, and forms part of the pre-history of the work in which the artist endeavors to construct the autonomous position or "mirada artística" (*Teoría* 39) that will allow for the possibility of intervening into social life.

THE RETURNS OF THE AVANT-GARDE IN POSTWAR CULTURE: PIGLIA AS NEO-AVANT-GARDE WRITER

While the history of Piglia's returns to Arlt and Macedonio, as well as the significance of these returns for his personal literary project, have been extensively documented in the critical

literature, they can also be understood to partake in a much broader international context, which art historian Hal Foster describes in terms of a diffuse array of neo-avant-garde tendencies that emerge in art, literature, and critical theory over the course of the second half of the 20th century.[101] In *The Return of the Real* (1996), Foster studies postwar artists' returns to the earlier works of avant-garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso, recasting the history of art in terms of psychic processes of latency and reactivation, and presenting a paradoxical figure in time that describes the historical fate of the advanced art of the early 20th century: "even as the avant-garde recedes into the past it also returns from the future, repositioned by innovative art in the present" (x). In this interpretation, the works of the historical avant-gardes are defined in terms of the traumatic rupture they enact in the symbolic fabric of their time: they produce a sort of psychic break in an art institution that lacks the tools to fully understand their impact, and they then come back into focus via the works of later generations of artists, who, in light of subsequent historical traumas, return to and attempt to work through the historical rupture enacted by their predecessors.

Foster addresses this strange temporality by modeling the art institution on the model of the psychoanalytic subject, as a psychic entity capable of repression and resistance.[102] He draws

[101] For a basic overview of the confluence of Roberto Arlt, Jorge Luis Borges, and Macedonio Fernández in the works of Piglia, see Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present,* pp. 86-106. For a general consideration of the relationship between Piglia's fiction and the literary tradition, see Jorge Fornet, *El escritor argentino y la tradición: Ricardo Piglia y la literatura argentina*, which is arranged around the guiding question "¿desde qué tradición narrar?" (7).

[102] As Foster recognizes, this is a polemical move: the tendency to conceive history on the model of the growth and evolution (or, conversely, devolution or regression) of the individual subject has often been exploited in highly problematic manners throughout the past two centuries, and is often associated with an outmoded "modernist" vision of history. However, Foster asserts that even when this tendency is disavowed, "[it] continues in contemporary criticism even when it assumes the death of the subject, for often the subject only returns at the level of ideology (for example, the Nazi subject), the nation (now imagined as a psychic entity more than as a body politic), and so on" (28). Foster concludes that "if this analogy to the individual subject is all but structural to historical studies, why not apply the most sophisticated model of the subject, the psychoanalytic one, and do so in a manifest way?" (28).

on the Freudian concept of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) to contest the idea that the innovative art of the avant-garde was "fully significant and historically effective" (8) at the moment of its creation. "Did *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* of Picasso *emerge* as the crux of modernist painting it is now taken to be?," Foster asks, immediately explaining that while this is obviously not the case, Picasso's painting "is often treated as immaculate in conception and reception alike" (8). Foster explains that historicist approaches to art model the institution of art on the model of the body, tracing processes of organic growth and decay as new works and artistic movements emerge over time. Deferred action allows him to propose an alternate understanding based on the model of the psychoanalytic subject: an initial event (Picasso's creation of *Les Demoiselles*, for example) produces a traumatic rupture in the symbolic order of a subject (the institution of art) who represses what has occurred; then, a second, later event (a later art work that reprises some aspect of *Les Demoiselles*, in this example) causes the subject to revisit the initial trauma and see it in a new light.

For Foster, this model underscores the manner in which one's view of the art of the past is framed by (and indeed constituted by) the emergence of a series of subsequent art works stretching forward to the present and into the future. This implies that the avant-garde is not born at some point in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, only to die some decades later, as many mid-century critics and art historians would have it. Rather, the initial trauma retains a perpetual, latent presence: it keeps coming back from the future as new art reactivates past traumas and allows for new re-codings of the meaning of the avant-garde. Following Foster, Piglia's literary project can be conceived as participating in a broader historical tendency in which artists around the world in the decades following the Second World War returned to the avant-gardes, encountering a spectrum of new possibilities of citation that involved re-working techniques and

re-telling stories told in previous art. Piglia's returns to Arlt and to Macedonio, in other words, can be taken as paradigmatic cases of a "neo-avant-garde" tendency that, as Foster's book emphasizes, marks one of the principal currents of late-20th-century art.

In the broadest sense, Foster views the relation between historical-and neo-avant-gardes as a "return in the form of a rigorous reading" (2) of the sort described by Michel Foucault in "What Is an Author." In that essay, Foucault describes Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud as founders of discursive practices, rather than authors: they opened new discursive fields composed of rules and possibilities that others could then explore in greater detail, generating concepts and hypotheses that both re-occupy, and also often diverge from, the founders' positions. In this context, Foucault describes a necessary and perpetual "return to the origin" in which later authors must come back to these founders. He explains that "[t]he return is not a historical supplement that would be added to the discursivity, or merely an ornament; on the contrary, it constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself" (219).[103] Foster proposes that the historical avant-garde movements of the early 20th century can also be thought of as collective founders of a new discursive practice, and asks if the sprawling landscape of postwar art, and its characteristic repetitions of avant-garde models such as the readymades of Marcel Duchamp, contains any returns that are "as historically focused and theoretically rigorous as the returns in Althusser and Lacan" (3). *The Return of the Real* identifies instances where this is the case, paying special attention to the way in which later artists triangulated their works with both their avant-garde forebears as well as key advances in theoretical discourse, such as those enacted by Althusser and Lacan.

[103] As Foster notes, Foucault must be thinking of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, whose respective re-readings of Marx and Freud had been published in the years prior to Foucault's essay.

The following sections re-read Piglia's lifelong literary project from this standpoint, focusing on phases in Piglia's textual production that can be thought of as, respectively, neo-Arltian and neo-Macedonian in nature. They center on how Piglia utilizes a variety of genres—the novel, the short story, the literary-critical essay, the interview—to situate each author in certain critical traditions: in Arlt's case, a revolutionary-Marxist tradition that stretches from Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, to post-Revolutionary Russia, Weimar Germany, and the China of Mao Zedong; in Macedonio's, that of the 20th-century reception of Friedrich Nietzsche in the West. This is to say that, when in "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt," Piglia cites pages from a fictional notebook written by Arlt in which the author analyzes a conflict regarding aesthetics and politics in the tumultuous early days of post-Revolutionary Russia, he is consciously constructing a version of Arlt that is legible in a Marxist discursive tradition that stretches from Russian formalists such as Yury Tynyanov, to Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, to Mao, Louis Althusser, and Alain Badiou. When inserted into this tradition, Arlt becomes a critical spectator of the major ideological events of the early 20th century, a sort of fellow traveler to the Marxist literary-critical tradition. Equally, when Piglia draws on Pierre Klossowski's now-canonical re-reading of Nietzsche in *La ciudad ausente* to reimagine key events in the biography of Macedonio, he is positioning Macedonio alongside thinkers such as Klossowski, Georges Bataille, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, all of whom (like Piglia's Macedonio) sought to reassess the nature of literature, philosophy, and modern political economy in response to the 20th-century mutations of modern industrialized societies. It is through these triangular dialogues, in which the avant-garde legacies of Arlt and Macedonio are filtered through major bodies of critical discourse, that Piglia's own project takes shape.

For a revolutionary avant-garde, a revolutionary Roberto Arlt

During the early years of his career, Piglia complemented his relatively sparse literary production (two short story collections published eight years apart, in 1967 and 1975) with a diverse array of literary-critical and editorial work, participating in the creation of influential literary journals such as *Literatura y Sociedad* and *Los Libros*, and serving as the director of two important series of publications made by the Buenos Aires press Tiempo Contemporáneo. One of these, the Serie Negra, consisted of a series of translations of North American crime novelists such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. The other, the Colección Trabajo Crítico, included major texts by key figures in continental philosophy and critical theory, such as Tzvetan Todorov, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Roland Barthes, as well as works by younger Argentine critics such as Josefina Ludmer and Piglia himself. Piglia's work with Tiempo Contemporáneo was guided by the dual aspiration to both modernize Argentine cultural criticism and build on the historical experience of the avant-garde: as he explains in a retrospective commentary on his work with the press, which was founded in 1967 and published more than 110 titles over the course of following decade, Tiempo Contemporáneo "[formaba] parte de un movimiento confuso de modernización de las armas de la izquierda: marxismo y estructuralismo, marxismo con las vanguardias" (qtd. in Emiliano Álvarez, "Tiempo Contemporáneo," np). In this light, the title of the first book published in the Trabajo Crítico series, Sanguineti's *Por una vanguardia revolucionaria*, stands as an emblematic indication of this broader project.

The proposal for a revolutionary avant-garde pursued by Sanguineti, and by Piglia and his colleagues at Tiempo Contemporáneo, emerges from the ashes of the much-proclaimed mid-century "death" of the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. Critics in the 1950s and 60s such as Leslie Fiedler, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Roland Barthes, among many

others, widely acknowledged the exhaustion of avant-garde strategies of artistic transgression, pointing to fact that historical movements such as Dada and Surrealism, as well as later followers of such movements, had become canonized not only by high-cultural circles but by popular, bourgeois culture in general.[104] As Fiedler emphasizes, due to the dynamics of the modern mass media, subversive authors such as Jean Genet and William Burroughs "have scarcely staked out a [new] territory before the tourists have come, then the carpetbaggers, and at last the middlebrow suburbanites—eager to set up housekeeping on prime sites overlooking the first landing places" (459). From a young age, Piglia accepts these positions concerning the historical eclipse of the avant-garde model of transgression. In pages from the first volume of the recently-published *Diarios de Emilio Renzi* that are dated to 1963, he acknowledges how another avatar of the avant-garde tradition, the *poète maudite*, has become "un producto de consumo que permite, vicariamente, a sus lectores, tener una experiencia excepcional y peligrosa" (139), thus situating himself at a moment when, it seemed, the avant-garde had come to constitute a recognizable tradition, but had also perhaps been fully subsumed by the modern societies against which it sought to enact a radical break.

The positions taken by Roland Barthes in a 1956 essay titled "Whose Theater? Whose *Avant-Garde*?" stand out for the way in which they frame the problem (in terms that largely coincide with Piglia's own diagnosis) and chart a path forward via a rigorous politicization of artistic activity. Barthes, who defines the avant-garde as the "parasite and property of the bourgeoisie" (69), describes its historical emergence as a metaphorical process of autoimmunization: society protects itself against potentially threatening oppositional elements by

[104] See Fiedler's "The Death of Avant-Garde Literature" and Enzensberger's "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde," as well as Matei Calinescu's overview of the crisis of the avant-garde in *Five Faces of Modernity*, pp. 120-125.

welcoming artists to transgress its norms, only to then inoculate itself against these transgressions.[105] For the dominant social class, the avant-garde is a "cathartic phenomenon, a kind of vaccine intended to inject a little subjectivity, a little freedom under the crust of bourgeois values: we feel better for having taken part—a declared but limited part—in the disease" (68). To move beyond this dead end, in which the prophylactic function of the avant-garde negates its critical force, Barthes proposes a two-stage focus on political action and artistic technique. In the first stage, following Bertolt Brecht, he champions the direct politicization of artistic contents as a means of transcending avant-garde's tendency toward the merely formal subversion of bourgeois cultural forms; and in the second, he proposes that this new, politicized theater project can then return to and resurrect the avant-garde tradition of formal experimentation, which relied from the beginning on techniques of denaturalization that took as their target not only the ideology of bourgeois culture, but "the very materiality" (69) of its cultural forms. In sum, Barthes concludes, "we are entitled to expect a great deal from a playwright who might give the new political art the deconditioning powers of the old *avant-garde* theater" (70).

This, in a nutshell, is the path pursued by Piglia. Like Barthes, he prescribes a combination of the direct politicization of artistic production and a renewed focus on technique as a means of safeguarding the newly politicized art from sliding back into bourgeois commonplaces. His decision to publish Sanguineti's essays as the inaugural number of the Trabajo Crítico series can be understood in this light: Piglia follows Sanguineti in seeking to

[105] Barthes compares the figure of the avant-garde author to that of the witch doctor or shaman, explaining that "[w]hat we have here is a phenomenon well known in sociology, the phenomenon of complementarism, of which Lévi-Strauss has given an excellent description: the *avant-garde* author is something like the witch doctor of so-called primitive societies: he *concentrates* the irregularity, the better to purge it from society as a whole" (68; emphasis in original).

rekindle the avant-garde via a sociological re-reading of its impact and shortcomings.[106] Sanguineti begins by identifying the museum and the capitalist marketplace as "las dos faces de la situación estética en la sociedad burguesa" (76), forming a sort of Scylla (the sublimation of art into the museum) and Charybdis (the neutralization of art's oppositional force through its commodification) between which a revolutionary avant-garde must come to chart its course. Sanguineti then proposes that one possible starting point for this revolutionary project can be found in Walter Benjamin's famous assertion that, beginning with the writings of Charles Baudelaire, modern artists enter into a contradictory relationship with the marketplace: they stroll into the market pretending to disinterestedly observe the flow of people and goods, but are secretly in search of buyers for their artistic wares. Sanguineti uses this idea to outline a basic problematic concerning artistic autonomy that will also characterize Piglia's own endeavor to re-think the avant-garde in revolutionary terms. For Sanguineti, art's situation within the capitalist marketplace is characterized by a false choice:

> Rechazar la degradante autonomía que se le ofrece, no significa aceptar, con estoico arrepentimiento, una heteronomía penitencial, sino que significa suprimir, desde el principio, la equívoca alternativa configurada de este modo. Se tratará, de manera tenaz y exclusiva, de forzar al máximo la contradicción presente en la heteronomía mercantil: debido a la mera astucia de la historia, la vanguardia expresa el momento dialéctico en el interior de la neutralización señalada por la mercantilización estética. (32)

[106] Piglia also served as the translator, under the pseudonym Emilio Renzi, of one of the three essays, "Sociología de la vanguardia."

Art's heteronomy, for Sanguineti, is a social fact: after Baudelaire, no artist can ignore that artistic production forms part of (and does not stand *apart from*) the capitalist production of commodities. In this light, autonomy is revealed to be a degrading illusion perpetuated by the dominant bourgeois value system, an illusion that papers over art's social condition by shrouding it in the humanistic, spiritual aura that, for bourgeois society, has always constituted art's essence. To reject this illusory autonomy does not, however, condemn the artist to what Sanguineti describes as a "penitent" exercise in heteronomy in which the artist, knowing full well that she is producing commodities, mournfully goes on doing the same. The critical potential of the avant-garde lies instead in its capacity to push the contradiction between social fact (heteronomy) and bourgeois ideology (autonomy) to its limit. The project of a revolutionary avant-garde, for Sanguineti and for Piglia, takes shape in the wake of this recognition that art is inscribed in capitalist production, yet is inscribed in the bourgeois marketplace precisely as an "autonomous" product of the human spirit.

In a series of early essays, Piglia situates his perspective on the avant-garde within the problematic sketched by Sanguineti, and at the same time elaborates his theoretical framework for the rigorous re-reading of the avant-garde literary tradition that structures his early textual production. In a broad sense, this has to do with bringing the Argentine literary system into contact with a genealogy of theoretical texts written in the years following the Russian Revolution. These texts include the foundational contributions of Russian Formalist literary theorists such as Sergei Tretyakov and Yury Tynyanov, and the later development of their ideas in the works of Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht.[107] Piglia sees in these texts the seeds of a modern,

[107] Piglia speaks at length in *Crítica y ficción* on the foundational status of Tynyanov for western literary criticism: "*La obra de arte en la época de la reproducción mecánica* de Benjamin es un desarrollo muy consecuente de las hipótesis de Tiniánov. En el fondo lo que hace Benjamin es mostrar de qué modo la serie extraliteraria, extraartística digamos mejor, determina el cambio de función. Por último, yo creo que la teoría y la práctica de Brecht son una de

materialist approach to literature, and gives special pride of place to Tynyanov's "On Literary Evolution," a text he describes in a 1985 interview as "el *Discurso del método* de la crítica literaria" (*Crítica* 175). For Piglia, Tynyanov's essay merits this comparison with Descartes' revolutionary treatise due to its rigorous analysis of the relation between literary form and history. Tynyanov accomplishes this by approaching the literary text in terms of a series of nesting series or systems. In a first moment, each work constitutes an autonomous system whose parts must be analyzed in terms of their function within that system. In turn, each work must also be understood as forming part of the synchronic system of literary works, as well as the historical series of works whose evolution constitutes the primary subject of Tynyanov's foundational essay. Finally, the critic must address the manner in which the genres, such as the novel, which constitute the literary system and appear to develop autonomously over time, are in fact characterized by a heteronomous relationship to society: they are produced, not as the manifestations of an autonomously-unfolding human spirit, but through historical dynamics that govern the passage into the literary system of extra-literary materials of linguistic and, more broadly speaking, social origin.

Piglia understands that critics such as Benjamin and Brecht, who entered into fruitful contact with the Russian Formalists in the years following the revolution, extended this framework for the study of the major cultural forms of the western world, building on Marx's analyses of the political economy of capitalism to arrive at a conception of literature as a branch of society's general production. This assertion of literature's heteronomous relationship to the forces and relations of production allows for a radical revision of the relation between history,

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las grandes herencias que la práctica de la vanguardia soviética de los años 20, de la cual las teorías de Tiniánov son una síntesis, le ha dado a la literatura. Brecht retiene lo mejor de la experiencia de la vanguardia soviética, Tiniánov y Tretiakov en premir lugar, y es uno de los pocos, otro es Benjamin, que la continúa en los años duros de la década del 30 y 40" (66).

politics, and literary form. The writer, in a key text by Benjamin, becomes a "producer" or "operator," and every technique used in the literary text is re-conceived not in reference to an ideal plane of spiritual meaning, but instead in terms of its function.[108] Questions of function, in turn, must be mapped to the distinct levels sketched by Tynyanov: each technique must be understood within the system of the text, in relation to the historical moment of the cultural field, as part of the series of texts whose evolution constitutes literary history, and in dialectical relation with a vast "extra-literary" series that can be further divided into linguistic and material (economic/productive) registers.[109]

Why does Piglia ultimately channel this project of a revolutionary avant-garde through a rigorous re-reading of Arlt? He discovers, in short, an embryonic materialist theory of culture at work in Arlt's writings, and seeks to actualize and flesh out the contours of this theory in order to

[108] Benjamin uses the example of postwar German writers to drive this point home: "One of the decisive developments in Germany during the last ten years [leading up to 1934] was that many of her productive minds, under the pressure of economic circumstances, underwent a revolutionary development in terms of their *mentality*—without at the same time being able to think through in a really revolutionary way the question of their own work, its relationship to the means of production, and its technique" ("The Author" 91; emphasis in original). Due to their blindness to the question of the author as producer, these writers' endeavors to demonstrate their revolutionary political commitment are fated to "[function] in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only *in the mind* and not as a producer" (91).

[109] In a series of early essays published in *Literatura y Sociedad* and *Los Libros*, Piglia brings these ideas to bear on debates interior to the Argentine left of the 1960s concerning realism, commitment, literature's place in society, and its relation to political action. In this context, Piglia stakes out positions that diverge sharply from two influential positions, both of which tended toward the condemnation of avant-garde aesthetic experimentation in defense of a realist mode of literary representation: that of Georg Lukács, who critiqued the "decadent" tendencies of the avant-gardes and continued to defend the possibility of a critical mode of realism able to map the social totality and sensitive to the tendencies driving social change, and that of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose ideas concerning commitment continued to exercise a major influence on the Argentine intellectual field. What these positions share, for Piglia, is an emphasis on content as the level at which the work obtains its political effect. Against both positions, Piglia pursues what Luis Ignacio García García describes as "la disolución de la separación entre tendencia política y técnica literaria" (62), insisting not only that political content is embedded in the formal/technical means employed by the writer, but that the relative inattention to the politics of literary form of writers and critics who follow Sartre and Lukács gives evidence to the ultimately conservative nature of their endeavors. Without acknowledging the historical and political content directly embedded in the production apparatus (the various historically-situated components that make up the writer's means of production, and which relate in turn to the development of society's productive forces), these writers overlook the principal manner in which the writer, as producer, participates in the class struggle: through technique, that is, through a focus on the moment of production of the literary work.

lay the foundation for his own work. A key passage from Arlt's "Escritor fracasado" (1933) that is cited in a footnote included in Piglia's "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" (1975) establishes the importance of Arlt for this project. The titular failed writer ponders the uselessness of poetry in an age of industrial production in which "[t]odo lo que se apartaba de la máquina era superfluo" (64). He rhetorically questions what a poem could do to alleviate "el aniquilamiento moral y físico de millares y millares de proletarios" (64), and, unable to formulate a response, shifts his thoughts to the question of the work's social function: "¿Entonces para qué servía un poema?" (64). He is then visited by a glimmer of idealist hope concerning literature and social class, which he quickly snuffs out in a moment of resolutely materialist reflection:

> "Todas las edades de la tierra han producido un escritor que ha superado a su clase y, de consiguiente, ningún oído ha podido dejar de escucharle."
>
> Al enunciar este pensamiento no me daba cuenta que mi razonamiento era producto de un espejismo, que los escritores llamados universales no han sido nunca universales, sino escritores de determinada clase, la más escogida y ensalzados por la cultura de esa clase, admirados y endiosados por las satisfacciones que eran capaces de agregarles a los refinamientos que de por sí atesoraba la clase como un bien excelentemente adquirido. (64).

The failed writer goes on to explain that the suffering masses, toiling away in the trenches of the class struggle, simply do not exist for those so-called "universal writers," and that he himself, who pertains to the ranks of "escritores democráticos" (64), equipped with good intentions and aspiring to reach a universal audience, is in fact "[totalmente incapaz] de escribir nada que removiera la conciencia social empotrada en un tedioso 'dejad estar'" (64). This last moment marks an important point of self-critique, in which the writer recognizes the inefficacity of a

well-intentioned "democratic" class of writers whose good intentions fail to move the foundations of the social edifice in the slightest.

This is the embryonic cultural materialism that Piglia unearths in Arlt. The failed writer's bitter unmasking of the mechanism that transforms the culture of the dominant social class into a "universal" expression of a human spirit[110] recalls similar formulations such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's equation of culture to the siren's song in the *Odyssey*, where one social class, the oarsmen of Odysseus's ship, cannot hear the song ("poetry," in Arlt's story) because their ears have been filled with wax so that they can concentrate on their labor, while another class, represented by the hero himself, is only able to hear and appreciate the sirens' entrancing melodies because he has removed himself from the sphere of labor by tying himself to the ship's mast. Piglia, however, would be more likely to cite Bertolt Brecht, or Mao Zedong, whose consideration of the relationship between aesthetic praxis and class struggle is summarized by Piglia in the opening paragraph of a 1972 essay that reads almost as a paraphrase of Arlt's own position, as if, in a Borgesian twist, Arlt were a precursor to Mao:

> El efecto estético, la significación ideológica, el modo de producción, las formas de distribución y de consumo, los materiales y los instrumentos de trabajo, es decir, el sistema literario en su conjunto, está determinado por los intereses de clase y son los intereses de clase los que en cada caso determinan qué cosa es el arte y a quién (para qué) "sirve." "No hay arte por encima de las clases (escribe

[110] Piglia's reading of Arlt bears the unmistakeable imprint of the works of two key predecessors: Oscar Masotta and David Viñas. Masotta's reading of Arlt's relation to the dominant bourgeois value system in *Sexo y traición en Roberto Arlt* lays much of the groundwork for Piglia's later analyses of the author, and Viñas's comprehensive study of Argentine literature during the decline of the liberal social order in the early 20th century in his *Literatura argentina y realidad política* series provides the basic historical framework for this reading of Arlt. Piglia filters his predecessors' analysis through the materialist theory of culture sketched here, positioning Arlt as the foundational writer for reflecting on the presence of the class struggle in literature.

> Mao). Negamos que haya un criterio artístico abstracto y absolutamente invariable; en toda sociedad, cada clase tiene sus propios criterios políticos y estéticos" (119).

Mao, like Arlt and like the Benjamin of "The Author as Producer," identifies the question of use and of social efficacy (the question of "¿Para qué sirve el arte?") as the central question for a materialist theory of culture. Idealist aesthetics is structured around an understanding of art as mimetic representation of social life, and revolves around the question of how society mimetically represents itself in art. The materialist aesthetics proposed by Piglia asks instead how art intervenes in society: instead of conceiving art as a spiritual good that transcends and mimetically reflects social relations, it asks what art is used for in the interior of those relations.[111] These are the questions that Arlt's failed writer is asking in the 1930s, and they are the questions that Piglia, via Mao, resuscitates four decades later.

At around the same time as Piglia wrote his essay on Mao, he also published a pair of programmatic essays in which he fleshes out Arlt's contribution to this materialist approach to culture. "Roberto Arlt: La ficción del dinero" (1974), opens with a thesis that, Piglia imagines, Arlt himself would have been capable of voicing: "El dinero—podría decir Arlt—es el mejor novelista del mundo: legisla una economía de pasiones y organiza—en el misterio de su origen—

[111] See the following entry from the second volume of the recently-published *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi*, which illustrates Piglia's endeavor to enact a break within still-too-bourgeois left-wing approaches to literature and defines the basic parameters of his project: "Anoche nueva hecatombe, violenta discusión (grabada) con [Marcos] Kaplan, [Noé] Jitrik, León [Rozitchner] y otros. Se pusieron todos en mi contra no bien puse en cuestión la autonomía de la literatura, mejor, la ilusión de autonomía en la literatura. Reacción intempestiva clásica de la izquierda liberal, que considera la cultura un campo neutro en el que se trata de tener posiciones abstractas … Están acostumbrados a discutir con los peronistas y defender la alta cultura, pero no están preparados para enfrentar una estrategia de vanguardia que busque intervenir en las relaciones del arte con la sociedad (y no a la inversa: de qué modo se ve la sociedad en el arte), o mejor, cuál es la función del arte en la sociedad" (273). Rather than focusing on how society is represented in the work of art, Piglia follows the work of Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and others in his insistence on approaching art in terms of its social function, that is, the way in which it participates in the general productive relations of society.

el interés de una historia donde la arbitrariedad de los canjes, las deudas, las transformaciones es el único enigma a descifrar" (25). The remaining pages of the essay elaborate the implications of situating money as the secret, productive motor of the novelist's art. The fictional text becomes a multifaceted machine for making money, and the content of the literary work reproduces generalized processes of social production on an imaginary level. If Arlt's texts are populated with machines, laboratorios, and scientific apparatuses, it is because "[ellos] tienen como objetivo común esa producción imaginaria de riqueza. Falsificación, invención, estafa, la metáfora última de este sueño es la escritura" (28).

"Roberto Arlt: Una crítica de la economía literaria" (1973), for its part, dedicates itself to showing how Arlt inverts the existing literary values by using his fictional and journalistic texts to narrate "las interferencias que se sufre, desde una determinada clase, para *llegar* a la escritura" (27; emphasis in original). To illustrate this inversion, Piglia foregrounds the scene of writing represented in Arlt's prologue to *Los lanzallamas*, where the author places himself in the noisy chaos of the newspaper office, willing himself to write his novel in "condiciones bastante desfavorables" (*Obras I*: 385) and stealing time away from the constant deadlines of his daily column. From the interior of this bustling newsroom, Piglia fleshes out a global critique of the idealist tendency to divorce literary creation from productive labor:

> En el prólogo a *Los lanzallamas*, Arlt se hace cargo de las condiciones de producción de su literatura: puesta en escena de la situación material en la que se genera un relato, este texto intenta definir el lugar desde donde se quiere ser leído. Al establecer una relación entre el lujo y el estilo, de entrada refiere lo que cuesta *tener* una escritura: el ejercicio de la literatura aparece ligado al derroche, trabajo improductivo que no tiene precio, se legaliza "en la vida holgada, en las rentas"

> de una clase que puede practicarla desinteresadamente. Para Arlt, en cambio, escribir es contraer cierta deuda, crédito que debe ser reconocido en el mercado. (22)

Arlt, by dramatizing the scene of his literary production, inverts the values of the dominant idealist conception of literature, which "se niega a reconocer las determinaciones económicas que rigen toda lectura, los códigos de clase que deciden la circulación y la apropriación literarias" (22). For Arlt, in contrast, the literary text is not a disinterested expression of the human spirit, but a commodity saturated through and through by economic interest. Rather than conceiving artistic activity as something done naturally during one's "free" time, for Arlt it is an exercise in unproductively *wasting* time that could otherwise be spent generating wealth. "Style," which had been a central concept for authors seeking to define the specificity of artistic production in both Europe (Flaubert, whom Arlt cites directly) and Latin America (the *modernista* tradition in poetry from Rubén Darío forward), becomes instead a direct manifestation of the writer's class origin. If one possesses rents (like Flaubert), one can work disinterestedly toward polishing one's prose and come to possess a style. Arlt lacks time, and thus lacks style: for him, time is something that can only be borrowed, stolen away from the hours he should be spending producing columns for *El Mundo*. He can only liquidate this debt by bringing his works to the market, where buyers (editors, booksellers, readers) will add value to his labor in the form of money. Arlt, by defining his literature in terms of its place in the production process (noisy workrooms, the smell of the ink used in Underwood typewriters), and laying bare the link between the production of "style" (a term that, like "technique," references the formal register of the literary text) and the socioeconomic status of the writer, lays the groundwork for a materialist understanding of literary production in Argentina.

"HOMENAJE A ROBERTO ARLT": LITERATURE AND THE LIMITS OF THE IDEOLOGICAL GAZE

"Homenaje a Roberto Arlt," originally published in the 1975 volume *Nombre falso*, marks the culmination of Piglia's years-long dialogue with Arlt within the horizon of the project for a revolutionary avant-garde. It is made up of two parts. The first part tells the story of how its first-person narrator, a character named Ricardo Piglia who is compiling materials for a new edition of Roberto Arlt's unpublished works, came into possession of a lost text written by Arlt in the final years of his life. The second part reproduces that text, titled "Luba." While "Luba" is presented as an authentic work written by Arlt, in the years following the publication of Piglia's "Homenaje," readers eventually concluded that it in fact plagiarizes Leonid Andreyev's 1916 novella *The Dark* (published in Spanish as *Las tinieblas*), reproducing its plot and embellishing it with a series of stylistic elements present in the writings of Arlt himself.[112] Over the course of the story, Ricardo Piglia (the character) discovers that a man named Saúl Kostia, an old friend of Arlt's whose name Piglia (the author) encountered in a prologue to Arlt's *Los lanzallamas* written by Uruguayan author Juan Carlos Onetti, has come into possession of that lost text. He enters into negotiations with Kostia to purchase it so that he can include it as the crown jewel of his compilation of unpublished Arltian materials, but in the end, Kostia double-crosses Piglia,

[112] Famously, a North American academic named Aden W. Hayes published a scholarly essay on "Luba" in 1987 based on the assumption that it was an authentic work by Arlt. Ellen McCracken´s 1991 article "Metaplagiarism and the Critic's Role as Detective: Ricardo Piglia's Reinvention of Roberto Arlt," published in *PMLA*, establishes the connection between "Luba" and Andreyev's novella, also pointing out that Piglia's forgery made it into the records of the United States Library of Congress, which attributed the authorship of "Luba" to Arlt in its entry for Piglia's *Nombre falso.* For helpful syntheses of the critical literature on Piglia's "Homenaje" and its implications, see Jorge Fornet, "'Homenaje a Roberto Arlt' o la literatura como plagio," as well as Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America*, pp. 195-198. As these and other critics have noted, Piglia's text leaves an important clue concerning the link between "Luba" and Andreyev in plain sight, so to speak, when in the text's final pages Piglia comes into possession of a metal box containing a small collection of additional materials pertaining to Arlt, among which is included "un ejemplar de *Las tinieblas* de Andreiev" (184). Without elaborating his reasoning, Piglia (again, the character) explains that amongst the materials found in the box, "encontré la explicación, el motivo, que había decidido a Kostia a publicar el relato de Arlt con su nombre" (184).

publishing the text under his own name in the Buenos Aires newspaper *El Mundo* (the newspaper for which Arlt had written his famous daily columns or *Aguafuertes*), and ruining Piglia's editorial project by claiming ownership of the text that was to be its centerpiece.

The "Homenaje" is thus a text about plagiarism, and it is also a text that is itself built around an act of plagiarism, an act which is used as a mechanism for putting into practice the materialist cultural politics sketched by Piglia. Bruno Bosteels emphasizes in his reading of Piglia's text that this cultural politics takes as its primordial task the need to "[define] literature's place … in a society organized around the private appropriation of work" (208). By grounding the process of literary creation in the unauthorized appropriation of other writer's texts (those of Andreyev *and* those of Arlt, both of which Piglia appropriates and puts to his own uses), Piglia's text can be read as a comprehensive putting into practice of the idea of literature that takes shape in his readings of Arlt. While the linkage of literature and theft that structures Piglia's story, and indeed constitutes its principal theme, is derived from a series of statements made by Arlt himself in his writings from the 1920s and 30s, it is an idea that, as Rita Gnutzmann emphasizes, Arlt himself never elaborated in a coherent fashion. Piglia's use of this idea must thus be understood as an interpretation (not a direct citation) of Arlt's work, as an act of appropriation in which Arlt's own statements are taken from their original context and inserted into a vision of literature that is not that of Arlt himself, but rather indicative of "cierta corriente crítica argentina, en la que se encuentra el propio Piglia" (439). By way of a series of neo-avant-garde procedures grounded in his initial identification of literature with theft, Piglia unearths meanings that are latent in the Arltian textual corpus, calling them back from the future, as Foster would put it, and bringing them to bear on the cultural problematic that dominated Piglia's early years as a writer: the project of a revolutionary critique of bourgeois culture.

In this reactivation of Arlt, it is not the plagiarized Andreyev novella, but another set of materials, which are presented in the text as Arltian "originals"—the transcribed pages of one of Arlt's notebooks, which Piglia the character obtains as he is tracking down Arlt's unpublished materials—that carry out the brunt of Piglia's labor of actualizing Arlt's vision of literature. They accomplish this by having Arlt effectively ventriloquize ideas and statements that were in circulation in the critical discourse of Piglia's time. In the pages of the notebook, Arlt asks, "¿Qué es robar un banco comparado con fundarlo?" (143), reproducing a famous Bertolt Brecht dictum, and he also reflects that "[e]l capitalismo especula con los buenos sentimientos" (142), loosely paraphrasing, as Bosteels notes, comments made by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Perhaps the centerpiece of this work done on Arlt's legacy lies in an extended reflection on art in post-revolutionary Russia, in which Piglia (the author) invents a series of notes written by Arlt for a newspaper column concerning an event in which a group of peasants, having arrived to Moscow for a congress on rural indigence, set foot in the Winter Palace and proceed to use a series of decorative porcelain vases as urinals. Arlt explains that this act scandalizes the writer Maxim Gorky, for whom the vases "son solo 'objetos bonitos,' intocables, que todos deben 'reconocer' y 'respetar'" (154). For Arlt, this shows that Gorky, like so many other well-intentioned left-wing artists, remains unable to comprehend the revolutionary impact of actions such as the peasants' "defilement" of the beautiful vases: "[n]i se le pasa por la cabeza pensar que los campesinos actuaban sin saberlo como críticos de arte, es decir, *usaban* los jarrones de Sèvres" (154).[113] The peasants, like Piglia's Arlt (and like Mao Zedong), have

[113] In order to link the events in Russia to contemporaneous discussions concerning art occurring half a world away in Argentina, Piglia cites the example of anarchist Paulino Scarfó, who wrote the following in a letter to his sister: "[s]I el pueblo revolucionario irrumpiera en mi habitación decidido a hacer pedazos el busto de Bakunin y a destruir mi biblioteca, lucharía contra él hasta el fin" (qtd. in "Homenaje" 153-4). Throughout the pages of Arlt's notebook, Piglia endeavors to connect the historical experiences of Russian revolutionaries and Argentine anarchists, inspired by a number of prominent commentaries made by Arlt himself concerning anarchism, most notably a 1931

arrived at a truly revolutionary standpoint by rejecting the linkage of art with a sphere of universal, humanistic values, and instead reducing art's value to class-based questions of use. Their actions are legible as critiques of Gorky's commentary, due to the way in which they reject universalist notions of beauty. As Arlt explains, their actions lay bare the fact that "la belleza sólo vale cuando uno puede contestar ¿para qué sirve? ¿cómo se puede usar? ¿*quién* la puede usar? No hay belleza universal" (156).

Throughout the "Homenaje," Piglia's manipulation and falsification of Arlt's writings is supported by procedures of textual montage, in which passages from a diverse array of materials written by Arlt, about Arlt, and about the revolutionary history of politics and aesthetics in the 20th century are cobbled together via diverse chains of attribution. These range from rigorous scholarly citation in footnotes, to false attributions, to pastiches where elements of existing Arltian texts are pieced together and given a new name, such as when materials from a series of Arlt's newspaper columns are blended together to create an autobiographical portrait that Arlt himself had supposedly prepared for use in a single-volume reedition of *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, a portrait that is included as a footnote in the opening pages of the "Homenaje." It is via these elaborate procedures of citation, which progressively blur the line between the authentic and the plagiarized, that Piglia's text voices its own neo-Arltian critique of a literary economy grounded in the bourgeois notion of private property. To properly honor Arlt's legacy, to produce an homage that is worthy of his name, is to subject his texts to these chains of falsifications in order to penetrate to the heart of the property relations that structure the production and reception of literary texts.

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newspaper column titled "He visto morir," which reflects on the execution of the famous anarchist Severino Di Giovanni, an event which Arlt himself attended as a member of the press.

As Bosteels insists, however, the question of plagiarism in the "Homenaje," while it at first might be taken to address a "purely literary-juridical question" (198) concerning intellectual property and textual ownership, must be understood in a much broader sense, as in fact questioning "the very boundaries of what is legitimate and what is not—at all levels of society, and not only in the realm of letters" (198). In doing so, it entangles itself with the content of Andreyev's story itself to form what Bosteels describes as an "obscure ethico-political web" (198) that is woven out of two categories of materials: the left-wing critical discourses of Piglia's time, which Bosteels strategically condenses into the couplet Bertolt Brecht/Mao Zedong, and also the critical discourses that later generations of readers bring to bear on the text. At the time of the publication of Piglia's text in the mid-1970s, it would have undoubtedly provoked discussions of "commitment" and "authenticity" amongst revolutionary intellectuals. In contrast, at a present moment characterized by the collapse of the revolutionary project in which Piglia participated, the ethical and political questions opened by the "Homenaje" need to be reformulated to acknowledge that shift: Bosteels, drawing on the work of Alain Badiou, suggests "fidelity" and subjective "purity" as alternate problematics for reading the "Homenaje" decades after its publication.

As Bosteels explains, "Luba," the plagiarized Andreyev story which forms the second part of Piglia's "Homenaje," addresses these questions through its use of a melodramatic storyline that draws on canonical 19th-century works such as Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* by employing "the restricted frame of an uneven struggle between two people," an anarchist named Enrique who is hiding out in a Buenos Aires whorehouse, and a prostitute named Luba, "in order to see how [the two characters] transform each other" (221). The struggle between them is uneven in the sense that Enrique is depicted as a virtuous intellectual who

desires to "save" a fallen woman whom he sees as "both victim of economic exploitation and object of physical and moral degradation" (224). Over the course of their interaction, however, Luba progressively turns the tables on Enrique (as the Russian peasants turn the tables on Gorky, and as Piglia's Arlt turns the tables on idealist understandings of literature), leading him to see that his superiority is in fact grounded in the very system of bourgeois values that he hopes to destroy. She shows him, as Bosteels emphasizes, that he has occupied the position of the beautiful soul whose sentiments of good conscience and purity have isolated him from the very masses that he hopes to win over:

> [O]nly a beautiful soul aspires to have clean hands, situating itself in a fantasy far removed from this filthy world. In doing so, it loses the possibility of approximating even the smallest truth, not only about the conflicts that this world obviously encloses, but also about the chains that these same conflicts project onto the innermost core of its own subjectivity. (225)

Luba teaches Enrique that the very position that he has chosen to occupy in order to attract the suffering masses to himself has in fact driven him away from them: he wants to prove to them that he is good and pure, but his purity instead repels them. As their interaction continues, Enrique comes to understand that he must reject this all-too-bourgeois belief that he can connect with the suffering masses by demonstrating the sincerity of his commitment to their cause. He learns that his moral truth (the abstract notion of goodness that governs his political activity) does nothing other than bar him from understanding a woman whom, when asked what *her* truth is ("¿Y tu verdad?, Luba. ¿Cuál es?," 202) responds simply and materialistically, referencing the affective impulse that governs her profession and her outlook on human society: "¿Mi verdad? … El deseo es mi verdad" (202). In Bosteels' reading, the message of "Luba," a work which

Piglia has employed toward overtly didactic ends, can be taken to relate to an essentially Maoist doctrine concerning the insufficiency of models of sincerity and conscious commitment that had driven revolutionary thought throughout much of the 20th century: Enrique learns (and the reader with him) that "no conscience … can be the absolute depository of truth, because conscience defines precisely the ground on which those values of bourgeois thought are erected whose destruction is sought" (228). At the story's end, having purportedly learned this lesson, Enrique is able to walk out of the whorehouse and into the hazy morning light, accompanied by the woman who concludes the story by informing him that Luba, her assumed name, is not her real name, which is instead the more prosaic "Beatriz Sánchez."

Bosteels' concluding remarks about the ultimate implications of Piglia's procedures of falsification in the "Homenaje" bear quoting at length due to the manner in which they delimit the stakes of Piglia's literary politics of plagiarism both within the literary field, as well as within what Bosteels calls the "ethico-political" field of the revolutionary project:

> Instead of being restricted to purely literary questions about originality, the cult of genius, or the modern invention of the rights of the author, the problematic of plagiarism according to Piglia contains a series of concepts and doctrines—the beautiful soul, purity, sincerity, the abolition of the new and the persistence of the old, good faith and bad conscious, the logic of melodrama, and so on—that, in reality, can be read as responses to a question about literature and politics that still remains open in the post-Leninist sequence, the sequence that begins with the closing and the exhaustion of the form of the party and its premise, which consists in standing at the vanguard of consciousness. (230)

Bosteels' reading, which concludes by defining Piglia's "Homenaje" as a post-Leninist text that enacts the collapse of the relationship between the party and the people that had structured Marxist revolutionary thought from the Russian Revolution forward to the 1970s, has to do with the collapse of a certain understanding of the avant-garde that was underwritten by that relationship. By way of the melodramatic narrative of a revolutionary anarchist who gives up the last thing he had to lose—his "purity" or good conscience, or the entire framework of "subjective and moralizing criteria" (226) that allowed Enrique to assume his position at the "vanguard of consciousness"—, in order to win over the young prostitute who ultimately accompanies him into the streets as the dawn breaks over a new day, Piglia's story recapitulates an entire history of avant-garde activity whose objective was, paradoxically, to demolish the very distinction that had grounded Marxist conceptions of the avant-garde throughout the 20th century. The collapse of the ethico-political distinction between the "avant-garde" consciousness of the anarchist intellectual and the "spontaneous" consciousness of the prostitute thus parallels the collapse of the literary distinction between intellectual property (the "ownership" of a text by its creator) and theft. In both cases, the positions taken by the intellectuals held up as examples of an all-too-bourgeois way of thinking (Enrique in the ethico-political dimension, Gorky in the literary dimension) are revealed as insufficient and inadequate for a truly revolutionary approach to culture.

Another way of putting all of this is that Piglia's "Homenaje" carries out a comprehensive overcoming of a certain distinction between art and life. "Art," in this context, refers to the works of art that are conceived as manifesting the advanced consciousness of artists whose ways of seeing modern life situate them at the vanguard of history. "Life," on the other hand, refers to the generalized, spontaneous way of seeing the modern life of the masses. What

the "Homenaje" endeavors to demonstrate is that between the artist/intellectual's "avant-garde" way of seeing things and the masses' spontaneous way of seeing things, there is no qualitative difference. What makes this heteronomous standpoint possible, in turn, is an understanding of the universal implication of consciousness in ideology. What Piglia's "Homenaje" offers, in other words, is an understanding of lived reality as ideology, an understanding which draws on contemporaneous discussions of ideology by Louis Althusser and his peers, such as the following definition of ideology from a short text by Althusser published in Spanish translation by the Buenos Aires press Tiempo Contemporáneo in 1974, in the series of "Trabajos Críticos" which was directed by Piglia himself. In response to critics who had asked him to clarify his understanding of the relationship between art, science, and ideology, Althusser explains that,

> Al hablar de ideología, debemos saber que la ideología se desliza en todas las actividades de los hombres, que es idéntica a lo "vivido" mismo de la existencia humana … Lo 'vivido' no es un *dato*, el dato de una "realidad" pura, sino lo "vivido" espontáneo de la ideología en su relación propia con lo real. (87)

The Althusserian definition of ideology addresses what Patrick Dove describes as "the very problem Piglia is grappling with: the dual necessity and impossibility of an adequate representation of the real" (225). To speak of lived reality—"lo vivido," or life in its lived, experiential form—is *already* to have produced a representation of that reality; the immediateness or "spontaneity" of life as it is experienced by the individual is already ideological, because what the perceiving subject perpetually elaborates is an imaginary, ideological relationship with reality. Consciousness is, by definition, ideological, and the very idea of a vanguard artist, intellectual, or party that could forge a path beyond ideology is nothing other than an ideological fiction itself, perhaps the most persistent fiction underpinning both

bourgeois *and* modern revolutionary culture. When Piglia's version of Arlt comprehends that the advanced consciousness of the artist is in fact grounded in historical processes of theft and expropriation, and when his version of Andreyev's revolutionary intellectual comprehends that his idealist, subjectivist notion of truth is in fact grounded in certain material or biological truths such as that of bodily desire (which Luba, the prostitute, knows as well as anyone), he is carrying the project of the revolutionary avant-garde to this precipice, where any possible "advanced" way of seeing the social world collapses into a universalized conception of lived reality as ideology, beyond which there is no possible "avant-garde" position left to occupy.

It is from this standpoint that, in a final turn of the screw, a notion of the autonomy of art, no longer linked to the subjectivity of the artist/creator, emerges, based on the manner in which the work of art is able to make visible the production of ideology itself. For, as Althusser emphasizes, art itself, or at least the "arte auténtico" (86) that is worthy of its name, can still be understood to possess a quality that detaches it from his conception of ideology: "lo propio del arte es '*hacernos ver*,' '*hacer percibir*,' '*hacer sentir*' algo que *alude* a la realidad" (86; emphasis in original). This way of making us see or feel something that alludes to a reality that is saturated by ideology is what allows art to maintain a degree of autonomy: it marks a step backward from ideology, a step that takes place on the interior of the work itself. It does not have anything to do with the political positions taken by the characters in the work, or with the political message that the author intended to transmit via the work. It rather relates to the way in which the well-elaborated work presents a reflection of the form of ideological representation itself: the imaginary relationship it establishes with reality mimics the subject's own processes of elaborating an always-imaginary relationship with the real conditions of her life. By repeating these processes, art dislocates them and allows them to be seen, perceived, or felt *as ideological*;

all three verbs are used by Althusser to contrast the experience produced by art with an experience of "knowledge" or "truth." Art does not reveal the ultimate truth underpinning ideological representations. It rather foregrounds the way in which ideology is produced and re-produced, a process that contains in itself an inherent moment of blindness in which the viewer, who believes herself to have attained a clear or lucid view of the reality of her life, has in fact attained this lucidity by papering over the imaginary nature of her representations.

In this light, it is important to note the way in which the dual endings of the two parts of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" center on questions of consciousness and truth, but also blindness and secrecy. If "Luba" culminates in a moment of communion between the revolutionary anarchist and the prostitute, where Enrique seems to have come to know Luba's truth and attained a true consciousness of her world, the first part of the text does not culminate in a parallel moment of recognition: Ricardo Piglia (the character) shuffles through a series of possible explanations as to why Kostia would have published Arlt's story under his own name, and he later comes into possession of a box of materials that, as he explains, allowed him to "[encontrar] la explicación, el motivo, que había decidido a Kostia a publicar el relato de Arlt con su nombre" (184). But he does not explain what this secret is: it remains opaque to the reader, whose desire to know the explanation for the act of plagiarism is left unfulfilled.

Bosteels, highlighting this structural presence of a blind spot at the heart of Piglia's text, explains that it can be taken to mark the "void that allows us to take apart the illusions on which rests the notion of representing a vanguard consciousness, whether in art or in politics" (229). There is no secret explanation that would reveal the truth of Kostia's action, for to claim to have encountered such a secret would be akin to claiming to find the truth behind one's ideological representations. Piglia's text is rather designed to lead the reader to the moment of constitutive

blindness that underpins such representations, and thus, "in all rigor, the story does not unveil anything but the nothingness that renders visible the false totality of existing ideologies" (229). It is in this moment of unveiling, not of a "truth" possessed by some human subject or another, but of the blindness that underpins all subjective representations of the truth, that Piglia's re-reading of Roberto Arlt, and his project of elaborating a revolutionary re-formulation of the avant-garde, reaches its culmination: the techniques of falsification that permeate the pages of the "Homenaje" have not pointed back to any sort of original ownership or primitive literary property, but instead to a moment of perception in which the reader comes to see the way in which these chains of false attributions have done nothing other than reproduce (and thus reveal) the nature of the reader's own ideological processes of attributing truth to her imaginary representations.

¿HAY UNA HISTORIA? *RESPIRACIÓN ARTIFICIAL,* FROM THE CITED STATEMENT TO THE CITED *RELATO*

If in the pages of the "Homenaje," as Edgardo Berg explains, "se sienten las bases de una posición ideológica: la propiedad en literatura entendida como robo" ("La búsqueda" 45), then Piglia's first novel, *Respiración artificial*, published five years later, might initially be understood as an extension of the possibilities opened by this linkage of literary property to theft. Berg provides a helpful summary of the diverse means used by Piglia in his novel. He lists the "diversos mecanismos del discurso doble: como la parodia, el pastiche satírico, la práctica de la citación o la captura y estilización de ciertos códigos literarios" (45). He also distinguishes a number of distinct modes of citation exercised by Piglia in the pages of *Respiración artificial*, "que van desde la descontextualización y el montaje, la falsa atribución, a procedimientos como la inversión y el desplazamiento propios de las citas paródicas" (45). These enumerations call

attention to how Piglia, by the closing years of the 1970s, had developed an arsenal of formal mechanisms for laying bare the disavowed origin of literary creation by acts of expropriation. In *Respiración artificial*, Piglia's use of citation reaches its apogee, proliferating outward from the particular case of Robert Arlt to encompass the entirety of modern Argentine history, as well as its complicated insertion into world history.

There are also important thematic affinities between the "Homenaje" and *Respiración artificial*, both of which recount one writer's search for another writer's lost papers, and both of which culminate in the (non)-revelation of the secret around which the texts incessantly revolve. In place of the relationship between Roberto Arlt and the young writer, Ricardo Piglia, who is compiling his unpublished materials, *Respiración artificial* centers on the relationship between a young novelist, Emilio Renzi (Piglia's oft-used semi-pseudonym), and his estranged uncle, the historian Marcelo Maggi. In the novel, Renzi exchanges letters with his uncle and eventually travels to the town of Concordia, on the banks of the Paraná River, to meet with him. The extended final section of the novel is set in Concordia, where Renzi waits for his uncle to arrive, discusses literature, philosophy, and history with a small cast of local intellectuals, and eventually receives a small archive of documents belonging to his uncle. Maggi himself never arrives: the secret of his fate, like the motivation for Kostia's publication of Arlt's "Luba" in the "Homenaje," is left obscure. At the novel's end, Renzi is simply informed that his uncle's secret is perhaps embedded in the documents he has just inherited: "Encontrará ahí, estoy seguro, la clave de su ausencia" (218). As he passes the documents on, Maggi's close friend, the Polish émigré Tardewski (whose role in the novel is similar to Kostia's role in the "Homenaje"), goes on to insist that Renzi will find, amidst the pages bequeathed by his uncle, nothing less than "[l]a razón por la cual él no ha venido esta noche. Allí está el secreto, si es que hay un secreto" (218).

In an important sense, however, this comparison between the "Homenaje" and Piglia's first novel misses an important turn that takes place in *Respiración artificial*, away from the formal questions of technique and falsification, and toward questions of historical experience, meaning, and storytelling. If throughout the 1970s, Piglia repeatedly returns to the Arltian/Maoist/Benjaminian question concerning "para qué sirve el arte," using Arlt as cipher for formulating responses. *Respiración artificial*, in contrast, revolves around a question that is established in the novel's opening epigraph, a pair of lines from a T.S. Eliot poem that, as Rita de Grandis emphasizes, serve to establish the "preocupación por la resignificación constante del pasado" (262) that structures Piglia's novel: "We had the experience but missed the meaning, an approach to the meaning restores the experience" (9). This turn toward an approach to meaning in history is then established in the relationship between Renzi and his historian uncle. Renzi begins his first letter to his uncle with a nod to Tynyanov, affirming that "[a]lguien, un crítico ruso, el crítico ruso Iuri Tiniánov, afirma que la literatura evoluciona de tío a sobrino (y no de padres a hijos)" (19). This citation of one of Tynyanov's most well-known statements can be read as the key for understanding Piglia's novel because it is, in a sense, a faulty citation: where Tynyanov uses the uncle-nephew relationship to describe processes internal to a literary system conceived as a family tree of novelists, poets, and playwrights united as a "family" by their common literary profession, the insertion of a social scientist, a *historian*, into the place of "uncle" marks the intrusion of an outside element into that system.

It is not that Tynyanov's approach would be incapable of explaining such an intrusion (in many ways this is its strength), but rather that the entrance of the historian and his concern with the signification and re-signification of historical experience into the family tree of "literary" writers marks a shift in emphasis. In contrast to the centrality granted to questions of literary

appropriation in Piglia's early essays and fictional texts, Maggi's presence at the center of the novel underlines the way in which, in the pages of *Respiración artificial*, historical meaning has come to the foreground. The emphasis has shifted from a primarily technical concern with citation and its link to property relations, to a narratological concern with history and its meaning: what happened, what did it mean, and what is the relationship between that meaning and the processes of narration or storytelling through which historical experience is communicated over time?

Respiración artificial, published in 1980 and set in the months and years following the military coup of 1976, famously begins with a question: "¿Hay una historia?" (13). Brett Levinson, highlighting ambiguities in the question's formulation, translates it as "Is there a/one history/story" (78). He goes on to enumerate some of the most pertinent possible interpretations of this question, focusing especially on those that concern the relationship between the dictatorship and narration—the telling of stories, and of national history in the wake of the epochal event of the dictatorship:

> Can the story of the dictatorship be told? Is there more than one history to be narrated? What is the relation between fiction (story) and "fact" (history)? But perhaps more at issue in this inquiry is whether the Argentine junta belongs to history at all. Or does it mark the end of Argentine history? For when the narratives and language that move the present into the past become impossible (as they become for Kafka), when national trauma sets in, it is not the case that history lacks a narrative. The case, rather, is that there is no history to narrate, for there is no passing of events. (78)

In light of the progression of texts studied in the previous pages, I argue that in an important sense, the question of if there is a story (or a history) to narrate when Argentine history has come to a standstill must also be understood to mark the end of Piglia's project for a revolutionary avant-garde. For that project had always been underwritten by one story that was taken as *the* story of human history, or of History itself: the story of the class struggle, a story set in motion by historically-grounded acts of expropriation, traces of which Karl Marx sought to access via his analysis of the legal processes of enclosure in 18th-century England, and a story that would then reach its culmination in the moment of revolution. The entirety of Piglia's project in the 1970s can be taken as an endeavor to unmask how this story manifests itself in literature: the revealation of a "literary economy" grounded in acts of authorial expropriation is aimed at nothing other than the revolutionary overcoming of the principle of private property in literature, which would form the unacknowledged truth of a literary class struggle stretching back to the foundations of the national literatures of modern nation-states such as Argentina. The dictatorship's enactment of what Levinson calls "Disaster," that is, "the unmediated emergence upon the social body of an atrocious actuality without *relatos*" (81), eclipses this story of a shared history grounded in the economic processes of society and the political struggle of a class that, famously, had nothing to lose except the shirt off its backs.

In light of the totalitarian regime's campaign of political violence and forced disappearances, what sense could there be in continuing to speak, as Arlt does at his most strident moments (the moments that form the starting point for Piglia's re-reading of Arlt), of an "edificio social que se desmorona inevitablemente" (*Obras I,* 386), or of a "futuro [que] es nuestro, por prepotencia de trabajo" (*Obras I*, 386)? Such affirmations only make sense when couched in a historical narrative of the rise and fall of a social class, the bourgeoisie, whose

cultural, political, and economic dominance formed the horizon for the revolutionary avant-garde's oppositional project. Importantly, the dictatorship's eclipse of that shared history—its consummation of a disaster that snuffs out the revolutionary project via practices of sequestration, clandestine torture, and disappearances—also poses a grave threat to Piglia's citation-based model of literary praxis: this model itself was grounded in a concept, that of *property*, that took on its ultimate significance in the context of the class struggle.

Piglia's novel does not immediately respond with a story that could replace the grand narrative of the emancipation of the proletariat; the solution to this problem concerning the lack of a story (*one* story) capable of responding to the historical fact of the dictatorship comes later, in the form of the conspiracy narrative around which Piglia re-narrates the history of the avant-garde as a history of conspiracies against the dominant political discourses of modernity. What *Respiración artificial* does offer is a means of preserving the efficacy of citation, which in the novel's pages shifts from a technique for laying bare the link between literary creation and property relations, to a technique that is *also* capable of resisting the dictatorship's drive to enact narrative closure. At base, this implies a revision of the basic unit of citation: if the statement ("an idea cannot be assassinated," for example, or "what is it to rob a bank, in comparison with founding one?") forms the primordial unit of citation in Piglia's earlier works, in the pages of *Respiración artificial* the story, or *relato*, takes its place. Stories told by others are cited by characters who have themselves told stories to be cited, in infinitely-proliferating series of narratives. As Levinson emphasizes, the *relato* as it is deployed in Piglia's novel forms the basic building block for a politics of language and storytelling, a logic of relationality in which narratives are not grounded in a subjective or national identity but are instead marked by difference. At the mythic moment of national origin that the totalitarian state continually refers

back to in its endeavor to ground the nation in a pure identity without difference (a "lost" identity that could purportedly be "found" again), *Respiración artificial* encounters difference itself: "[i]n the beginning is not identity, lost or otherwise, but contact and difference, infection and defection, a brush with the Other" (57). There is no proper ground for national history, but only a confused mass of *relatos* that perpetually exceed the totalitarian aspiration to narrative closure.

As Levinson emphasizes in his above mention of Kafka, this understanding of difference is a question not only of language itself (conceived in Saussurean terms as a system of differences without any positive ground), but also of storytelling. To tell a story is to inhabit this groundless system, to populate it with the experiential content that provides both the primordial material of the *relato* and of history itself, which is never fully translated into the stories that use language to make sense of historical experience, but instead persists as a "past that defies symbolization and that, precisely because it defies symbolization, never ceases to be present as agony without cure" (77). If the totalitarian dictatorship conspires to "complete history's picture" (76) by filtering *all* possible stories formed by *all* possible experiences into its self-representation as the consummation of the nation's destiny, the relational nature of the *relato* perpetually marks the disavowed limit of this project: that "[n]o sum of finite experiences and narratives will ever equal infinity or totality" (76).

The question of narration—the narratological question of how stories are constructed, and the historical question of how stories have been, and can be, narrated across different moments of history—persists as a central concern from Piglia's earliest days as a writer. He often links this concern to his youthful readings of North American authors whose literature was based in a "narrative good conscience," in which the author and the reader are bound together by a shared

desire to hear a well-told story.[114] In this sense, the way in which Piglia's first novel approaches questions of storytelling and the construction of historical meaning does not mark the emergence of narration as a guiding concern (one could say that his overarching aspiration was *always* to tell a good story), but rather his comprehension of the threat posed to narration by the dictatorship. Is there a story, if the overarching Story (the Marxist story of the class struggle) that had framed the author's relationship to history has been annihilated? Levinson's acknowledgement of the relationality of language and narration highlights the transitional solution discovered in *Respiración artificial*. Against the apocalyptic vision with which Levinson closes his chapter, of "the Argentine nation without end, totalitarianism ripping through the body of every citizen, the tortured person's desperate call to no one or nothing since there is no one or nothing to come—no other, no outside, no more relatos, no more period" (81), literature finds its calling as an "interminable project" (80) whose purpose is to mark the limits of the discourse of a totalitarian state bent on upholding its limitlessness.

By binding the praxis of citation to the relational logic of the *relato*, Piglia's first novel articulates an initial response to the question posed in the opening sentence of its first page: due to the very nature of the story—its citational, relational nature—there will *always* be a story, another story, that arises to mark the internal limits of the totalitarian aspiration to "end" history. As Dove emphasizes, rather than rearranging the many stories transmitted in its pages into a new grand narrative, *Respiración artificial*, in pointing to the partial and fragmentary nature of the stories that grace its pages, "holds out the hope that [historical] insight might be found *between*

[114] In a 1986 interview, Marithelma Costa asks Piglia to reflect on the impact of his reading of North American literature. He responds that authors such as Carson McCullers, Raymond Chandler, Flannery O'Connor, and Phillip K. Dick provided him with "[u]n modelo de narrar, un tipo de relato con mucha intriga y mucho *plot*. Esa especie de 'buena conciencia narrativa' que es la tradición de la literatura norteamericana. Narrar y Narrar … podría seguir toda la tarde nombrando a los grandes narradores norteamericanos que empecé a leer [entre 1960 y 70]" (41).

these fragments of the whole, and within the condition of transcendental 'blindness' that they share" (226). In response to the historical trauma of the military dictatorship and its disastrous endeavor to complete history and bring to an end the perpetual processes of narration and re-narration of historical experience that characterize national life, Piglia's novel elaborates a practice of storytelling, grounded in the relational nature of stories (and history), which preserves this utopian moment of hope in the midst of the devastated social landscape wrought by the military regime.

"Hay que construir un complot contra el complot": Piglia's "Postmodern" Theory of the Conspiracy

The demise of the project for a revolutionary avant-garde which forms the historical context for *Respiración artificial*, and to which Piglia's first novel seeks to formulate a response, is also the story that is told in one of the foundational documents of late-20th-century cultural theory: the programmatic essay, originally published in 1984, that opens Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). After mapping some of the core characteristics of postmodernism as the new cultural dominant in the late 20th century, Jameson moves to raise "the more genuine issue of the fate of culture generally" (47), proposing that a series of "our most cherished and time-honored radical conceptions about the nature of cultural politics may thereby find themselves outmoded" (48). This has to do with what Jameson describes as the historical eclipse of modernist understandings of the semi-autonomy of the cultural realm, which Jameson associates with Herbert Marcuse's discussion of affirmative culture (where even the most conventional cultural artifacts preserve a spectral, utopian promise of future happiness) and which Piglia also seeks to overcome in his writings of the 1970s. Jameson, in a famous appraisal

of the consequences of this "momentous modification" (48) of culture's social function, then insists that this dissolution of culture's semi-autonomy does not imply that the cultural realm has disappeared, but rather that culture has permeated everything that used to be thought of as outside of culture:

> [T]o argue that culture is today no longer endowed with the relative autonomy it once enjoyed as one level among others in earlier moments of capitalism (let alone in precapitalist societies) is not necessarily to imply its disappearance or extinction. Quite the contrary; we must go on to affirm that the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of culture is rather to be imagined in terms of an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and yet unauthorized sense. (48)

As Jameson goes on to stress, this generalization of culture undermines the "single, fundamentally spatial presupposition" (48) that had guided those above-mentioned time-honored conceptions about the nature of culture and its relation to the political: the notion of critical distance, which had always allowed for a minimal space separating cultural production from general social production and safeguarded "the possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital" (48). While Jameson does not use the word "avant-garde" in these pages of *Postmodernism*, the implication is quite clear: any movement, or any artist, that continues to use the term "avant-garde" as a critical concept to ground an oppositional artistic project that seeks to conquer new terrain in the cultural field is fated to find that terrain *already* conquered by the new cultural dominant, which Jameson calls "postmodernism." The very

notion of an avant-garde ceases to make sense: there are no advanced positions left to conquer, and radical intellectuals find themselves fatally "submerged in [postmodernism's] henceforth filled and suffused volumes" (48).

The intellectual histories of Piglia and Jameson demonstrate important affinities, intersecting on key discursive reference points such as the writings of Bertolt Brecht and Mao Zedong, and pointing toward many of the same conclusions. In a sense, Piglia and Jameson's respective critical projects ran parallel for quite some time, and in this light I argue that what Jameson's *Postmodernism* carries out is nothing other than the canonization, or institutionalization, of Piglia's revolutionary project of laying bare the historical obsolescence of the cultural-political understandings of autonomy (or critical distance) that underpinned the modernist project. Jameson's writings on postmodernism trace the contours of a new terrain saturated by culture—the terrain that Piglia himself has explored since at least the early 1970s. This unified "postmodern" field of social existence, dominated by capital and saturated through and through by culture, had always constituted the logical endpoint of the project of a revolutionary avant-garde. If Piglia's early career was dedicated to convincing his readers, via essays and fictional texts, that this was indeed the emergent cultural reality of his time, Jameson's work confirms the success of the endeavor and changes the stakes for those who continue to pursue the dream of an oppositional culture from within the space of postmodernism.

Jameson's theory of postmodernism was widely critiqued by Latin Americanist scholars due to what many perceived as an overly stagist approach to world history in which peripheral regions, because they lag behind the advanced economies of the west, retained pockets of "modernist" resistance to the cultural dominance of postmodernism through much of the 20th century. This is evidenced by the great novels of the Latin American literary "Boom," which

mark, for Jameson, a belated "high-modernist" moment in the region.[115] All that would be left for peripheral regions such as Latin America, then, would be to catch up to the rest of the advanced world. This chapter will not rehearse those critiques, but will rather follow the path of Willy Thayer's essay "Vanguardia, dictadura, globalización," which, without directly citing Jameson, re-traces the history of avant-garde movements in Chile from the 1950s to the 1980s to demonstrate how, in a narrative that demonstrates affinities with Piglia's treatment of Argentine history, the avant-garde in Chile is violently abolished by the military regime led by Augusto Pinochet and the subsequent transition to neoliberal democracy.

Thayer reads the Chilean avant-gardes along the lines proposed in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, as being primarily oriented toward the overcoming of art's institutionalized autonomy. For Thayer, at their most revolutionary, the Chilean avant-gardes link the institutionality of art to the principles of mimesis and representationality that underpin not only art but all of the other "autonomous" spheres of modern life (science, jurisprudence, politics, and so on). The avant-gardes establish as their goal the overcoming of the entire "metafísica de la representación en cuya inmanencia se desenvuelve la vida misma en todas sus esferas—incluida la del arte como una más" (247). The overarching aspiration of the avant-garde can be defined in terms of a will to presence, a drive to break through psychic and institutional barriers and attain a perfectly unmediated experience of life-as-absolute-presence. Thayer's linking of art and representation leads to a reading of Chilean history in which the 1973 coup and the subsequent military dictatorship outflank the avant-garde: the suppression of political representation under the dictatorship announces the breakdown of representation as such, and by 1979, "la institución

[115] See, for example, Santiago Colás, *Postmodernism in Latin America: The Argentine Condition*, as well as the essays compiled in the 1995 edited volume *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*.

representacional moderna—sostenida en la oposición *representación/presencia*—es siniestramente abolida, neutralizando la posibilidad de cualquier práctica contrainstitucional" (252). The totalitarian regime's abolishment of political institutions of representation, such as democratic elections and parliamentary politics, mark its broader eclipse of the representational underpinnings of modernity as a whole. If the avant-garde was driven by a generalized will to overcome representation in the sphere of art, the dictatorship annihilates representation in all spheres of life.

The second and final step of this epochal transition occurs with the end of the dictatorship and the emergence of what Thayer calls "la globalización post-estatal, post-representacional, post-imperial-colonial y como única chance" (253). Globalization, for Thayer, names the universalization of the promise of presence that had originally guided the avant-gardes in their critique of representation. The capitalist commodity, like the works produced by the avant-gardes, is sustained by the interplay between representation (exchange value) and presence (the use value that, in commodity exchange, shifts to a second, spectral plane). Globalization can be thought of as the moment when capital itself comprehends this fetishistic nature of the commodity, as if global capital had read *Capital* and learned Marx's lesson: what Thayer calls the "golpe globalizador" confirms that the avant-garde pursuit of presence has become a resource of capital itself, and thus enacts "la deflación de la presencia al transparentarla como fetiche. La globalización no es otra cosa que la nihilización de la voluntad presencia y acontecimiento que activó a la vanguardia" (257). If the dictatorship can be understood as something like the nightmare of the avant-garde's will to abolish representation, globalization can be thought of as capitalism's nihilistic re-occupation of the will to presence that guided the historical movements of the avant-garde. Just as for Jameson the cultural has come to permeate the entirety of social

existence, for Thayer, the avant-garde's cultural project has come to permeate the globalized world economy.

Thayer's essay offers an alternate scenario concerning how Latin American countries arrived at the historical condition that Jameson calls postmodernism, and which Thayer prefers to call globalization. Diverging from the geopolitical, stage-based structure of Jameson's model, Thayer presents an alternate sequence of moments that Southern Cone countries such as Chile and Argentina passed through on the way to a present in which the avant-garde's revolutionary project has been demolished by a series of historical crises. If Piglia's early literary output took shape against the backdrop of the widely declared mid-century "death" of the avant-garde, his work from the early 1980s forward might be best understood against the backdrop of this second "death," that of an avant-garde overtaken first by the historical trauma of the dictatorship, and then by a transition to democracy that has witnessed the uncanny rebirth of its will to presence as the beating heart of the new globalized economy. And, as in his project for a revolutionary avant-garde, Piglia once again retains use of the term "avant-garde," elaborating a comprehensive reimagining of its modern history under the general heading of the conspiracy.

There are two complementary sides to Piglia's theory of the conspiracy. The first proposes a general understanding of the relationship between literature and politics, in which the complot emerges as a literary form that lays bare the disavowed, fictional ground of politics. In these general terms, the complot functions as a point of articulation connecting literature, defined as a practice of constructing alternate realities (or *fictions*), to politics, which inevitably must ground itself on fictions such as myths of origin and other narrative means of establishing the political community. Politics, which aspires to establish itself as a "práctica de verdad" (*Crítica* 86), cannot rid itself of these fictional origin stories: a paranoid, conspiratorial logic persists in

every political statement, across history.[116] In this theorization of the relationship between the fictional and the political, as David Kelman explains, all political statements are embedded with a conspiracy plot because "every political narrative must tell the story of an illegitimate force that is undermining the legitimacy of an official or hegemonic discourse" (9). As Kelman emphasizes in *Counterfeit Politics*, Piglia teaches that the paranoid mode of reading political narratives should not be taken as a "substitute politics" or a "retreat into an imaginary world of intrigue, into mere literature" (3). It is rather to claim that conspiracy stories are a positive condition for politics to take place: conspiracy is a structural necessity for all forms of politics, and Piglia's work on the conspiracy is dedicated to showing how literary texts comprehend this truth by deploying the conspiracy as a formal mechanism.

In the second place, Piglia extends this general theory to a consideration of the historically-grounded relationship between a particular form of politics, modern liberalism, and a particular use of the conspiracy-form, that of the avant-garde. He proposes that every liberal political statement is embedded with a spectral avant-garde conspiracy, and that the avant-garde can be defined as "una práctica antiliberal, como una versión conspirativa de la política y del arte, como un complot que experimenta con nuevas formas de sociabilidad, que se infiltra en las instituciones existentes y tiende a destruirlas y a crear redes y formas alternativas" (*Las tres vanguardias* 83). This theory of the avant-garde as anti-liberal conspiracy takes shape in a series of texts that include the interviews compiled in *Crítica y ficción* (1985), the 1990 lecture series

[116] This logic also works in the opposite direction: literature, which is always conditioned by, and implicated in, the political reality from which it emerges, always bears the marks of a conspiracy against politics, and entire literary traditions, such as the Argentine tradition, can be understood by using the complot as a conceptual tool for deciphering the relationship between the literary and the political. When, in a 1986 interview, Piglia is asked by Horacio González and Victor Pese to return once more to the question of politics and literature, he responds, quite simply, that "[l]a literatura trabaja la política como conspiración, como guerra: la política como gran máquina paranoica y ficcional. Eso es lo que uno encuentra en Sarmiento, en Hernández, en Macedonio, en Lugones, en Roberto Arlt, en Manuel Puig" (*Crítica* 73).

recently published as *Las tres vanguardias*, his second novel, *La ciudad ausente* (1992), and the essay "Teoría del complot" (2002). In these texts, Piglia proposes that the avant-garde is a movement internal to modern art that requires liberalism as its antagonist. More precisely, the avant-garde emerges to confirm and exacerbate a series of historically-grounded crises of liberalism. Baudelaire, writing in the wake of the European Revolutions of 1848, is perhaps the first to sense this relationship between artistic vanguard and liberal crisis, sensing that "[e]l arte se ha desligado del consenso liberal" and defining the artist as an "agente doble, una espía en territorio enemigo" (*Teoría* 35). Conversely, at moments where liberalism is on the offensive and reaffirms its dominance, the avant-garde itself enters into crisis: "[s]i hay un renacimiento del liberalismo, hay crisis de la vanguardia y todos retroceden hacia el mercado y hacia las instituciones establecidas … Si triunfa el liberalismo, no habría entonces espacio para la vanguardia" (51-55). It is in this context—that of the historical triumph of neoliberalism and what Piglia sees as its cultural avatar, postmodernism, which together come to form the "nuevo contexto unificador" (51) at the turn of the 21st century—that Piglia turns to the notion of the conspiracy as a means of marking an "avant-garde" difference within liberal politics, studying both its classical 19th-and-early-20th-century forms, as well as the recent resurgence of neoliberalism in Argentina and throughout the west.

It is in this second aspect of Piglia's theory of the conspiracy that Macedonio Fernández comes to take pride of place. Laura Demaría describes the approach to literature that Piglia progressively embraces during the 1980s in terms of the discovery of a back door or *tranquera*, which she calls the "Macedonio-tranquera" (140), and which allows Piglia a way out of a possible dead end for revolutionary literature that was sketched by one of Piglia's peers, Rodolfo Walsh. Walsh sees the production of fictions as antithetical to a revolutionary literary praxis,

proposing instead to "[d]ejar la ficción … para trabajar con la 'simple presentación' de los hechos, sin ficcionalizarlos, para hacer la literatura útil que se vuelva 'arma' y que incomode al lector" (137). Piglia, in contrast, discovers a second option that is latent in the works of Macedonio that allows for "un nuevo modo de no disociar la ficción de la política" (140), and he uses this option to elaborate a politicized approach to literature that emphasizes how the production of literature conspires against the political by producing counter-figurations of political forms that undermine politics' aspiration to fully conquer the realm of the possible:

> [Para Piglia], Macedonio constituye, en síntesis, un umbral, una 'tranquera' que enseña a ver—a leer—cómo la novela, la ficción 'mantiene relaciones cifradas con las maquinaciones del poder. Las reproduce, usa sus formas.' Macedonio-tranquera hace ver, en síntesis, cómo la ficción afirmada como pluralidad, como creación continua, deconstruye el concepto restrictivo de 'lo posible' modelado por el poder al articular ella misma la pluralidad de lo catalogado como 'imposible,' es decir, la 'contrafigura utópica' no monológica que abre y descentraliza los sentidos unívocos impuestos por el Estado. (140)

As Demaría emphasizes, Macedonio's literary project lays bare an uncomfortable and disavowed truth underlying the political paradigm of liberalism: the fact that, beneath a surface characterized by transparency, consensus, and public debate, the conspiracy has always secretly structured liberal politics. As Piglia puts it in the 1990 lecture series *Las tres vanguardias*, "el complot y la relación entre novela y Estado como mundos antagónicos son la gran novedad que trae Macedonio Fernández a la literatura argentina … La gran novedad de tratar de ocupar el lugar del Estado sin entrar jamás en lo que podríamos llamar el espacio liberal de la política" (190). Via the conspiracy, Macedonio's literature refuses from the beginning to play liberalism's

game, instead staking out an autonomous, "avant-garde" space (the conspiratorial space) within a political field saturated by liberal notions of consensus and transparency and producing texts that generate utopian counter-figures of the liberal state. In Piglia's extensive re-reading of Macedonio as anti-liberal conspirator, it is undoubtedly his second novel, *La ciudad ausente*, in which Macedonio appears as the one of the novel's central characters, that marks his most sustained and important reflection on the author. As the following pages will propose, at the heart of this re-reading of Macedonio is a complex, neo-avant-garde endeavor to triangulate Macedonio's use of the conspiracy with that of one the foundational thinkers of modernity, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

La ciudad ausente : The Nietzschean conspiracy of Macedonio Fernández

In a well-known essay on the short story form, Piglia proposes that the modern short story, from Edgar Allen Poe and Anton Chekhov to 20th century writers like Ernest Hemingway and Jorge Luis Borges, is characterized by a double logic. Each story in fact tells two stories: a "visible" one that the narrator organizes into the sequence of causally-linked events that forms the story's plot, and a "secret" one that peeks out through the interstices of the first one. Piglia cites a plot sketched in Chekhov's notebooks where a man goes to a casino in Monte Carlo, wins a large sum of money, then returns to his home and commits suicide. One would expect the story to unfold differently: the suicide would make more sense if it were preceded by the *loss* of a large sum of money, an event which could then be interpreted as one of its principal causes. In its reversal of a conventional pattern of events (loss of fortune, suicide), Chekhov's plot takes the form of a paradox that tends to de-couple or drive the two stories apart. The reader, having read the "visible" story, is then obliged to search for glimpses of the enigmatic suicide peeking

through the narration of the man's night of gambling successes. Piglia proposes that variations of this double logic are perpetually at work in short stories. Borges, for example, constructs the visible story out of the conventions of a given genre (such as gauchesque poetry or the detective story), and makes the *construction* of a secret story the primary theme of the text: stories such as "Emma Zunz" and "La muerte y la brújula" narrate "las maniobras de alguien que construye perversamente una trama secreta con los materiales de una historia visible" (*Tesis* 99). Kafka, for his part, inverts Chekhov's manner of organizing the two stories, placing the secret story in the foreground. A "Kafkian" telling of Chekhov's story would narrate, matter-of-factly, the events leading to the suicide, while offering glimpses of a terrible, threatening reality ciphered into the story of the man's successes at the gambling table.

Bosteels, in the reading of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" discussed above, systematically applies this logic to Piglia's 1975 text by differentiating between the "visible" story regarding the relationship between literature and political economy, and the "secret" story concerning the leftist politics of the 1970s, which Bosteels reads in terms of two key referents, Bertolt Brecht and Mao Zedong. Behind the visible story, Bosteels explains, "there effectively lies a second lineage, at once oblique and yet secretly alluded to … which we can refer to as the invisible lineage of Brecht-Mao" (198). Bosteels reads Piglia's "Homenaje" in terms of these parallel series, with the secret history of the Argentine reception of Brecht and Mao peeking through the visible story. The following pages suggest that Piglia's second novel, *La ciudad ausente*, can also be read in terms of this double logic. The novel's visible story is constructed around the biography and ideas of Argentine novelist Macedonio Fernández, and the novel itself can be read as Piglia's reflection on Macedonio's legacy in the closing years of the 20th century. The secret story, centers on Piglia's dialogue with a body of avant-garde theoretical discourse, including

works by Georges Bataille, Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, that utilized a rigorous re-reading of the philosophical project of Friedrich Nietzsche as a starting point for a radical critique of liberal modernity. The following pages will focus specifically on the figure of Klossowski, whose writings in the 1950s and 60s helped establish Nietzsche as a foundational theorist of modern social dynamics and formed a key inspiration for the major works of Foucault and Deleuze.[117] In the 2002 essay "Teoría del complo", Piglia acknowledges the importance of Klossowski to his writings on the conspiracy, emphasizing the impact of Klossowski's 1969 monograph *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* among Argentine intellectuals in the early 1970s, as well as highlighting the continuing relevance of Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche for a critique of neoliberalism at the close of the 20th century.[118]

The following pages elaborate an extended dialogue between Klossowski's 1969 monograph *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* and Piglia's *La ciudad ausente*, proposing that the Klossowski-Nietzsche couplet occupies a "secret" place at the heart of Piglia's second novel. To paraphrase Bosteels, the invisible lineage of Nietzsche-Klossowski is at once oblique and yet secretly alluded to in the visible lineage of Macedonio-Piglia. While Piglia's general familiarity

[117] See Daniel W. Smith's introduction to the English translation of Klossowski's *Living Currency* for an appraisal of Klossowski's impact on Deleuze and Foucault. After the 1970 publication of *Living Currency*, Foucault wrote the following to Klossowski: "I should have written to you as soon as I first read *Living Currency*; it knocked the wind out of me, of course, but still I could have responded. Now, after having reread it several times, I know that it is the greatest book of our time. One has the impression that everything in one way or another—Blanchot, Bataille, *Beyond Good and Evil*, too—leads straight to it, insidiously … What you have done for us all, Pierre, is truly beyond all thanks and recognition" (41). Deleuze also wrote to Klossowski while he was working on *Anti-Oedipus*, explaining that the ideas presented by Klossowski were of "immense importance; for it is the only means to get out of the sterile parallelism Marx-Freud, Money-Excrement … Once again, I'm following you" (3). Smith emphasizes that that the theory of desire developed in *Anti-Oedipus* was "Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to work out the theses proposed at the opening of [Klossowski's] *Living Currency*" (Introduction, 3).

[118] In the initial version of *Teoría del complot*, published in 2002 in the journal *Ramona*, Piglia explains that *Nietzsche* attained a certain prominence in Argentine intellectual circles during the early 1970s: it was, as he puts it, "[u]n libro que dicho sea de paso que discutíamos mucho con Germán García, con Oscar del Barco, con Ruth Carranza y con otros amigos, en los tiempos del grupo 'Literal' y de la revista 'Los libros'" (12). Piglia here references perhaps the two most famous literary journals of the decade: *Los Libros*, which pursued a broad-based political reading of cultural production, and *Literal*, which pursued a radically avant-garde approach to the literary text inspired by the works of Jacques Lacan and Macedonio Fernández himself, among others.

with Klossowski's thought is not in question, the lack of direct references to Klossowski in *La ciudad ausente*, along with Piglia's death in 2017, make it impossible to establish this intertextual relationship with absolute philological veracity. This reading of Piglia's novel highlights three thematic clusters where the secret presence of Klossowski's monograph shines clearest in Piglia's novel, and to bookend these readings of *La ciudad ausente* with a pair of considerations of the area where, undoubtedly, Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche most strongly impacted Piglia's own work: his identification of the conspiracy-form as a conceptual tool for understanding Nietzsche's philosophical project, which Piglia extends to a comprehensive re-thinking of the relationship between artistic production and the socioeconomic processes governing modern societies.

Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle (henceforth *Nietzsche*) begins by signaling a point that had hitherto been passed over by Nietzsche's readers: "as Nietzsche's thought unfolded, it abandoned the strictly speculative realm in order to adopt, if not simulate, the preliminary elements of a conspiracy" (xv). Klossowski, who proceeds to re-read Nietzsche's writings from the standpoint of the conspiracy, explains that the philosopher's objectives are expansive: he aspires to alter nothing less than "the existing forms of the human species as a whole" (xv), and to enact a radical alteration of the "sensibility, emotivity and affectivity, [and thus] the impulsive life of each and every person" (200). To achieve this, Nietzsche delimits an equally expansive adversary: the totality of modern society, which becomes legible as the vast conspiracy of a social "herd" which Nietzsche, following the ideas of Charles Darwin, conceives in terms of an overarching dynamic of "*gregarious conformity*" (76; due to Klossowski's prevalent use of italics, all emphasis is in the original unless otherwise noted). When Nietzsche speaks of gregariousness, he references the way in which the exceptional qualities that on occasion arise in

individuals are perpetually leveled-down via an evolutionary social process aimed at the conservation of the species. In modernity, the rare, the singular, and the exceptional are relentlessly submitted to the impoverishing logic of standardization that permeates social intercourse: human language perpetually defines and codifies the unique in terms of the known, and economic exchange, following the principle of general equivalence, relentlessly reduces the new and the singular to its capacity to be made equivalent to something else. For Nietzsche, the value system governing modern society is grounded in these processes, and his conspiratorial projects aim to overcome this implacable social conspiracy designed to perpetuate the human species via the conservation (that is, the "taming") of the exceptional.

As Klossowski explains, the imperative of formulating a counter-conspiracy against the overarching Darwinian social conspiracy takes shape in Nietzsche's thought in the wake of a singular lived experience: the experience of the eternal return, felt by the philosopher in the alpine village of Sils-Maria in the summer of 1881. In this experience, Nietzsche fleetingly occupies the place of the singular and glimpses the possible emergence of a new humanity from the ranks of the gregarious herd. This experience persists in his psyche with an obsessional force, generating a series of conspiratorial projects grounded in the possibility of nurturing and developing a new human type through the isolation of a small group of "'rare and singular plants'" whose singular qualities make them into a "'race' having '*its own sphere of life*,' freed from any virtue-imperative" (166). By secluding such rare breeds into conspiratorial "hothouses" where their singularities could be cultivated, rather than being neutralized by gregarious social forces, Nietzsche lays the groundwork for a micrological conspiracy to combat the vast

evolutionary conspiracy of modern society.[119] If 19th-century society "*conspires with gregariousness* by presenting *mediocre* beings as *strong*, rich and powerful beings" (169), the Nietzschean conspiracy, which is carried out behind the back of this society, aspires to produce "an insurrection of the affects *against every virtue-imperative*" (167), in which the new humanity cultivated through these conspiratorial activities would "blossom forth" (167) onto the stage of the vast Darwinian social conspiracy, radically altering the life of the social herd.

In its consideration of the relationship between modern liberalism and the avant-garde, Piglia's theory of the conspiracy the gregarious social conspiracy studied by Nietzsche. For Piglia the modern liberal state functions by way of its own "gregarious" procedures of consensus, transparency, and public debate, all of which aim to smooth over exceptionality and shape society into a harmonious whole. The avant-garde, then, follows in Nietzsche's footsteps by forming counter-conspiratorial cells of experimental action *against* this conspiratorial State and its drive to suppress singularities through the perpetual production of consensus. By conspiring against the governing rationality of the modern liberal state, the avant-gardes identify themselves as so many singular plants capable of experimenting with new forms of sociality aimed at overcoming the existing structures of liberal society. In this light, the legacy of the avant-garde can be understood in terms of an overarching imperative guiding its artistic and political practices, an imperative which already stands in stark relief in Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche: "[h]ay que construir un complot contra el complot" ("Teoría" 4).

[119] Deleuze defines Klossowski's notion of the conspiracy as a "community of singularities" that aims to overcome a society characterized by processes of "regularization": for Klossowski, "What we all a society is a community of regularities, or more precisely, a certain selective process which retains select singularities and regularizes them … But a *conspiracy*—this would be a community of singularities of another type, which would not be regularized, but which would enter into new connections, and in this sense, would be revolutionary" (quoted in Klossowski, "Circulus Vitiosus" 46).

Piglia returns to the subject of the avant-garde as anti-liberal conspiracy in "Teoría del complot," an essay first published eight years after *La ciudad ausente*, in which he elaborates an extended analysis of Klossowski's *Nietzsche*, using it as a starting point for a consideration of the legacy of the avant-garde in the wake of the postwar resurgence of liberalism, in the form of what is now generally referred to as *neo*-liberalism. His task in that essay is ultimately to theorize the possibility of a neo-avant-garde conspiracy against neoliberalism.[120] In this trajectory, *La ciudad ausente* constitutes Piglia's central and most sustained reflection on Klossowski's theory of the Nietzschean conspiracy, and that his return to Klossowski in "Teoría del complot" functions as something of a coda to his 1993 novel. At the center of *La ciudad ausente*'s work on the conspiracy is the novel's conversion of Macedonio Fernández into Argentina's foundational "Nietzschean" conspirator; from this initial assimilation, Piglia pursues a series of additional consequences opened up by Klossowski's identification of the conspiracy-form as the central *dispositif* of Nietzsche's critique of modernity.

PART I: MACEDONIO'S NIETZSCHEAN MACHINE

The plot of *La ciudad ausente* revolves around a conspiracy to build a storytelling machine that would allow Macedonio to preserve the memory of Elena de Obieta (his wife who died prematurely in 1920) from the fate of death, and at the same time set in motion an open-ended process of political resistance against a totalitarian state whose agents lurk in the background throughout the novel. The reader learns of this machine—its history, its origins, and

[120] "Teoría del complot" was initially presented as a conference paper in 2001 and was later published in the journal *Ramona* in 2002. It was then re-published as a standalone monograph in 2007 by Ediciones Mate. The two published versions both include various paragraphs copied verbatim from Piglia's 1990 lectures, including the passage cited above from *Las tres vanguardias*. They also contain a handful of variations. The mention of Piglia's readings of Klossowski in the early 1970s, for example, is elided from the 2007 book version. Throughout, my parenthetical citations will clarify from which version I am quoting.

its dual affective and political motivations—through the story of a journalist named Junior, who is carrying out an investigation of the machine. His investigation eventually leads him to Macedonio's co-conspirator, an émigré engineer named Emil Russo, who constructed the machine based on Macedonio's instructions in his workshop on an island in the Río de la Plata delta. In an extended interview with Russo, which brings the investigative storyline that structures the novel to a close, Junior hears how Russo came into contact with Macedonio, and why they conspired to construct the mysterious machine at the center of Piglia's novel.

The groundwork for Piglia's alignment of Macedonio and Nietzsche is based not only on Piglia's reading of Macedonio's biography, but also, and perhaps more importantly, on a synthesis of two major critical paradigms regarding Macedonio's literary production. The first of these is the psychoanalytic framework proposed by Germán García, whereby "[l]a muerte *real* de Elena abre un abismo *imaginario*: la rareza del estilo de Macedonio muestra que es en otro lugar, en lo *simbólico*, donde debería intentarse una respuesta" (16). In his interview with Junior, Russo explains that the machine was constructed in the years after Elena's death, during a time when "todo lo que Macedonio hizo … (y ante todo la máquina) estuvo destinado a hacerla presente" (46). His words echo those of García, who explains how [e]l trabajo de matar la muerte de Elena, que Macedonio realiza en su escritura, es la única vida posible para el ausente" (18).[121] *La ciudad ausente* supplements this structure of personal loss and symbolic restoration by adding a second, political motivation for the machine, which draws heavily on Piglia's own reading of the political significance of Macedonio's literature. When Russo describes the machine in terms of

[121] García also cites a verse written by Macedonio in the following years, "Yo todo lo voy diciendo para matar la muerte en ella" (qtd. in "Por Macedonio," 18), which could also be taken as the overarching motive of the construction of the machine. In the words of Idelber Avelar, it represents "Macedonio's utopia," through which he aspires "to construct an affective machine that could tell a story of grief and lost love, as an attempt to cancel out death in a virtual world" (111).

conspiratorial resistance against the state, as "una réplica microscópica, una máquina de defensa feminina, contra las experiencias y los experimentos y las mentiras del Estado" (142-3), he is essentially reproducing the following position taken by Piglia in *Las tres vanguardias*: "el complot y la relación entre novela y Estado como mundos antagónicos son la gran novedad que trae Macedonio Fernández a la literatura argentina" (189).[122] The Macedonio Fernández who appears in *La ciudad ausente* is at once the grieving husband profiled by García, as well as the avant-garde conspirator studied by Piglia himself, and the machine at the heart of Piglia's novel is guided by these dual motivations.

It is from this standpoint that the impact of Klossowski's *Nietzsche* is most strongly felt, for the Nietzschean conspiracy is also primordially driven by affective and political aims: it seeks to keep open the possibilities glimpsed by Nietzsche, the individual, in the fleeting experience of the eternal return, and it aspires to overcome the social-Darwinian conspiracy of the gregarious herd. The pages of Piglia's novel harmonize the figures of Macedonio and Nietzsche on both of these levels, exploiting important affinities between their visions of society, as well as the consequences of their respective personal experiences in their intellectual projects.

To bring together the respective sociocultural horizons of Nietzsche and Macedonio, *La ciudad ausente* secretly elaborates a series of parallels between their respective understandings of modern social dynamics. Both writers share a common emphasis on how sociocultural

[122] In contrast with his earlier emphasis on Robero Arlt, beginning in the 1980s Piglia consistently gives Macedonio pride of place in his discussions of the avant-garde in Argentina, positioning his experimental texts as *the* founding documents of the avant-garde and studying them in opposition to both the liberal tradition in Argentine politics and culture, as well as against Leopoldo Lugones's cultural-nationalist critique of liberalism. In *Las tres vanguardias* and elsewhere, Piglia encounters a common conspiratorial logic at the heart of a series of major projects undertaken by Macedonio over the course of his life, including a ludic campaign for president in 1920, a youthful (and short-lived) voyage to Paraguay to found a utopian colony, and a vast, fragmentary novel project that eventually bore the title *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* and in which, as Piglia puts it, "se cuentan dos cosas: cómo se escribe una novela y cómo se hace una conspiración" (*Las tres vanguardias* 85)

modernization lead to the pernicious impoverishment of the human being. Where Klossowski emphasizes that, for Nietzsche, "*equalization* (in the guise of the democratization practiced by industrial society) implies … a reduction of the human being" (165), Piglia's Macedonio (rather anachronistically) views the rise of Japanese models of industrial production in the decades after the Second World War as indications of a new historical condition in which the entirety of humanity has been brought in line with the examples of conformism and corporate duty ("gregariousness," Klossowski's Nietzsche would say) embodied in the Japanese executives, workers, and technicians who have come to constitute, for Macedonio, "los representantes ejemplares del hombre moderno" (142).

Second, both Nietzsche and Macedonio not only envisage the possibility of resisting this new situation by the isolated activity of a group of exceptional individuals, but focus specifically on a potential alliance between scientists, artists, and inventors. For Nietzsche, while science has been completely integrated into the gregarious conspiracy of perpetuating the human species, there nonetheless remains the possibility that it could be decoupled from, and turned against, the social herd. In this case science and art would become "*sovereign formations*" establishing themselves as "*dominant powers*, on the ruins of institutions" (145). Macedonio, according to Russo, envisaged a similar de-coupling of science, based on a mid-century situation in which politicians had come to place their faith in scientists, and scientists in turn placed their faith in novelists such as James Joyce, naming the basic particle of the universe the *quark* in homage to *Finnegans Wake*. For Macedonio, this chain of alliances leads to a logical conclusion: the artist-inventors who conspire against society must ally themselves with the scientists: "[h]abía que influir sobre la realidad y usar los métodos de la ciencia para inventar un mundo donde un soldado que se pasa treinta años metido en la selva obedeciendo órdenes sea imposible" (142).

Third, and finally, both Nietzsche and Macedonio define the conspiracy in terms of a process of leaving the realm of the theoretical and acting directly on reality. In the conspiratorial activities envisaged by Nietzsche, "creation ceases to be a game at the margins of reality; henceforth, the creator will not re-produce, but will itself produce the *real*" (129). Macedonio, for his part, sees that the "cerebro japonés" (142) that guides the modern State has become a vast "mecanismo técnico destinado a alterar el criterio de realidad" (142). His conspiracy is guided by the conviction that any act of resistance must directly influence, and alter, the "Japanese" criterion of reality that is incessantly reproduced across all levels of society by the modern State.

This harmonization of conspiratorial political horizons is complemented by a similarly complex process of articulating the personal antecedents of Nietzsche and Macedonio's respective conspiracies around a shared vision of a reality unbounded by personal identity. For Klossowski, the eternal return is initially an affective experience *felt* by Nietzsche at Sils Maria. It is a pulsional force, described by Klossowski as the "*hohe Stimmung*, the high tonality of [the] soul," (59), which subsequently takes the form of a phantasmatic thought in which the philosopher's identity is perpetually dissolved and re-constituted in the circular recurrence of all things: "the metamorphosis of the individual is the law of the Vicious Circle" (71), and to adhere to this law is to commit to a perpetual "re-willing [of] all experiences, and all one's acts, but not as *mine*: this *possessive* no longer has any meaning, nor does it represent a goal" (70).[123] Macedonio, like Nietzsche, was a frequent reader of the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, and his philosophical writings include repeated visions of a universe that hews very close to this

[123] Klossowski emphasizes that this is a troubling thought and proposes that Nietzsche's conspiracies are aimed at allaying the imminence of the absolute dissolution of his identity that was presaged at Sils Maria. The Nietzschean conspiracy aims to temporarily allay this dissolution by "*assimilating other consciousnesses to himself* so as to *flee the destruction of his own*" (121), buying time and maintaining the lucidity of his thought against the delirium of the eternal return as he prepares himself for what Klossowski calls "the most seductive of *trials* … the trial of his own metamorphosis" (122), in which the philosopher's self will dissolve into the flow of the affects.

vision of the eternal return, which in a Schopenhauerian conceptual vocabulary might be conceived as an unmediated experience of the universal Will that subtends the individual's representations. Throughout his writings, Macedonio repeatedly returns to a conception of existence as a universal sensibility or "almismo ayoico," an affective flow of states that are *felt* rather than cognized:

> [Llamo] al Ser un almismo ayoico, porque es siempre pleno en sus estados y sin demandar correlación con supuestas externalidades ni sustancias … Ayoico, o sin yo, porque es una, única la sensibilidad, y nada puede ocurrir, sentirse, que no sea el sentir mío, es decir, el místico sentir de nadie … El ser es místico, es decir, pleno en cada uno de sus estados; esta plenitud significa: no radicación en un yo y no dependencia o correlación con lo llamado externo y lo llamado substancia. (*Obras completas* 8, 243)

While the pages of *La ciudad ausente* do not directly cite Macedonio's metaphysics, this vision of existence, in which the self dissolves into a universal sensibility that is complete unto itself, underpins Macedonio's conspiracy and forms its necessary antecedent. The very possibility that a storytelling machine could preserve Elena from the fate of death is grounded in this vision of a reality which, as Russo puts it, "es interminable y se transforma y parece un relato eterno, donde todo siempre vuelve a empezar" (155). Macedonio's machine aims to reproduce this reality on a purely verbal level (which, as will be discussed later, generates a series of problems concerning the relationship between language and bodily affects), generating an infinite universe of stories that, like the figure of the *aleph* that appears in one of Jorge Luis Borges's most famous stories,

would be "pleno en cada uno de sus estados."[124] The machine produces this universe by following a logic of translation set in motion when it was fed a single story, the Edgar Allen Poe story "William Wilson," and subsequently emitted a new variation that bore the title "Stephen Stevensen" (41). From this initial transposition of Poe's story, its emissions have expanded to form an infinitely-proliferating series whose source materials include not only the lived experiences of all of the city's inhabitants, but also literary and historical elements such as the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges and the events surrounding the 1982 Falkland War. The machine is thought to function in perpetuity, such that versions of these stories—*all* stories—will cyclically recur in its transmissions, which circulate through the city in rhizomatic networks. To incorporate Elena's story into the machine is to free her into this universe, in which the limitations of notions such as "life" and "death" are dissolved into a singular, universal sensibility.

The experience of the "Macedonian eternal return" remains something of an absent space in *La ciudad ausente*, but Russo does describe one possible moment in the hours following Elena's passing when Macedonio might have had such an experience. On that day, after remaining in a state of contemplative, anguished silence for various hours, Macedonio suddenly began speaking with an odd, wavering voice, as if he had just been affected by a particularly

[124] Elsewhere, in a short piece on Macedonio that can be considered as one of a series of preparatory materials for the composition of *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia stresses the centrality of the series personal tragedy-metaphysical experience in some of the central texts in the Argentine tradition, which are united by the way in which "la historia … de la mujer perdida desencadena el delirio filosófico" ("Notas" 94). In stories such as Jorge Luis Borges's "El aleph" and Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*, as well as in the tangos of Enrique Santos Discépolo, "[l]a pérdida de la mujer es la *condición* para que el héroe … adquiera esa visión que lo distancia del mundo y le permite filosofar" (95). The death of the beloved is the necessary threshold through which these literary figures must pass in order to glimpse the secret nature of the universe: "[e]l hombre herido en el corazón puede, por fin, mirar la realidad tal cual es y percibir sus secretos" (95). In this light, Piglia's chief contribution to this literary tradition consists in linking this epiphanic vision set in motion by a personal tragedy to the obsessive elaboration of conspiracies designed to act directly on the socially-and-politically-constructed criteria that define "reality" at a given historical moment. Lurking behind this conspiracy is the figure of Klossowski's Nietzsche, whose experience of the eternal return and whose conspiratorial activities are ciphered onto the life story of Macedonio Fernández in the pages of *La ciudad ausente*.

intense experience. It is at that moment that Macedonio fixes his attention on the thought of a machine that could save Elena from oblivion by eternally dissolving and re-constituting her story as a "relato eterno" whose general form would be that of "[un] río que fluye, manso, en el atardecer" (154). Ultimately, the question of whether *this* was the moment in which Macedonio experienced something like the Nietzschean eternal return is less important than the structural necessity that such a moment must have occurred *at some point* in the days, months, or years leading up to the construction of the machine. For Macedonio's invention to make sense (for it to do what it proposes to do), its inventor, like Friedrich Nietzsche in the alpine heights of Sils-Maria, must have been affected by such an experience of a reality unbounded by the self, which would then persist in his psyche as the obsessional thought driving his conspiracy.

PART II: ELENA'S NIETZSCHEAN DELIRIUM

In the introduction to *Nietzsche*, Klossowski emphasizes that, in addition to the conspiratorial nature of the Nietzschean philosophical project, there is a second key point that previous scholarship tended to overlook or misinterpret: the relationship between delirium and lucidity in Nietzsche's thought. As Klossowski explains, because Nietzsche's thought obsessively revolves around the lived experience of the dissolution of personal identity in the eternal return, for many readers he seems to repeatedly fall prey to the excesses of "an interpretative delirium that seemed to diminish the 'responsibility of the thinker'" (xv). Rather than chalk this tendency up to extenuating psychic circumstances (which would be confirmed by Nietzsche's 1888 mental breakdown), Klossowski insists on the necessity of confronting this relationship, proposing that Nietzsche's thought "*revolved around delirium as its axis*" (xv). In the wake of his experience at Sils-Maria, Klossowski proposes, Nietzsche's work was defined by a perpetual tug-of-war

between lucid thought and delirium: as he sought to buy time and prepare for the emergence of the new human type envisaged in Sils Maria, "his every effort was directed toward fighting the irresistible attraction that Chaos (or, more precisely, the 'chasm') exerted on him" (xv). This effort reaches its culmination in the months leading up to the 1888 breakdown. In a series of letters written to friends such as August Strindberg, Jakob Burkhardt, and Cosima Wagner, the scales tip toward delirium as Nietzsche's writing dramatizes the dissolution of his personal identity (and of the lucidity of his thought) into the intensive flows of a universe unbound by the self by utilizing a constantly-shifting series of signatures saturated with personal, historical, and philosophical resonances, including "Dionysus," "Nietzsche Caesar," and "The Crucified." This play of names, in which the proper name "Nietzsche" is "dispersed and reassembled at different levels, and at different intervals in time" (250) marks the culmination of the cycle that began in Sils Maria. What Klossowski describes as the "miraculous irony" (252) of Nietzsche's final euphoria marks the success of his philosophical project, but it equally marks the utter collapse of the lucidity of the philosopher's thought in a final, "jubilant dissolution" (252): "[n]ow that the agent 'Nietzsche' is destroyed, there is a festival for a few days, a few hours, or a few instants—but it is a sacrificial festival" (253).

This drama of psychic dissolution is revisited in the pages of *La ciudad ausente* through a story that complements the story of the conspiratorial construction of Macedonio's machine, and which centers on a character named, precisely, "Elena Obieta." Elena's status in the novel is open to at least three interpretations. She may be the story-transmitting machine itself, an automaton possessing a "cráneo de vidrio" (66) and an oxidized metallic skin, and which is animated with the spirit of Macedonio's deceased wife. Alternately, she may be a psychotic patient at a Buenos Aires psychiatric clinic under the care of a disciple of Carl Jung named Raúl

Arana, who *imagines* herself to be the machine created by her now-deceased husband in order to save her from death. Finally, she may also be a political operative sent to infiltrate that clinic and expose the nefarious activities (the torture of political prisoners, perhaps) that take place within its walls, who is *pretending* to be a psychotic patient who believes herself to be a machine in order to gain access to Arana's clinic, which in this reading becomes a clandestine site of state-sponsored torture. Without ever resolving Elena's ambiguous status, the novel ends with a delirious monologue spoken by her, which is readable as an additional series of emissions produced by the machine, or as the ongoing manifestations of Elena's psychosis as she lies "atada con correas de goma" (163) in a hospital bed, or as the delirious thoughts of a woman submitted to the inquisitional procedures of a torturer who demands "nombres y direcciones" (79) and threatens to "deactivate" her unless she provides the information he is requesting. In this monologue, as Elena (whatever she is) rests in a state of immobility, her discourse slowly breaks down into a stream of evocative feminine names that recall the "jubilant dissolution" of Nietzsche's thought in the final weeks of 1887:

> He sido lo que he sido, una loca argentina a la que han dejado sola, ahora, abandonada para siempre, él tiene ahora qué edad, dicen que encaneció en una sola noche cuando me fui … Yo soy Amalia, si me apuran digo soy Molly, yo soy ella encerrada en la casona, desesperada, la mazorca, soy irlandesa, digo, entonces, soy ella y también soy las otras, fui las otras, soy Hipólita, la renga, la cojita … soy Temple Drake y después, ah viles, me hicieron vivir con un juez de paz. (163-4)

Through her repeated affirmation of identities that are not "hers," Elena's story repeats the Nietzschean sacrificial festival in which the proper name of the speaker (Friedrich Nietzsche,

Elena de Obieta) is dispersed into a bifurcating network of names and stories. If Elena is taken to be the reanimated "soul" of Macedonio's machine, these final pages should be understood to both dramatize the machine's functioning and mark the success of the Macedonian conspiracy: Elena becomes Amalia, Molly Bloom, Temple Drake, Hipólita, and each of these figures will in turn become her in future permutations of the machine.

Klossowski's study of Nietzsche's euphoric correspondence, however, resists any possible reading of his final letters as indications of the success of his philosophical project. While his language is affirmative—he speaks of "jubilance" and of "euphoria"— his reading of Nietzsche's correspondence is equally disturbing, due to the fact that this euphoria is bought at the price of the utter collapse of the lucidity of Nietzsche's thought. In this light, as Keith Ansell Pearson emphasizes, Klossowski's monograph may well be both "the most extraordinary text on Nietzsche ever composed, as well as one of the most disconcerting and disquieting" (84). In the pages of Piglia's novel, Elena's delirium should also be understood in this manner, due to two complementary reasons. FIrst, the ambiguous nature of Elena's character allows a series of much darker allusions to peek through the "visible" story of her existence as a story-emitting machine, as her story is repeatedly linked to both the scene of the psychiatric hospital, where patients are strapped down to hospital beds as they are treated for their psychoses, as well as the clandestine scene of torture, where the female body is pushed to delirium through the interrogation methods of the agents of the totalitarian State. These possibilities shadow the entirety of Elena's presence in the novel, culminating in the delirious discourse of the novel's final pages: the fact that her status as a character is irreducible to any of the three options sketched above means that a reading of *La ciudad ausente* as an allegory of the political violence of the Argentine dictatorships, or as a patient confined to a psychiatric hospital, perpetually peek through the

interstices of the story of Macedonio's machine, following the double logic of the short story outlined at the beginning of this paper.

In addition, the unification of the three possible storylines concerning Elena under the sign of a distinctly Nietzschean delirium casts a dark shadow over even the most "jubilant" of these possibilities, according to which her delirious discourse would mark the success of Macedonio's conspiracy. While in the closing paragraphs of his interview Russo broadly acknowledges the success of the machine, which will implacably go on producing replicas of replicas of all of the stories it has transmitted, including the story of its own creation, he then proceeds to identify this success with a *crime* whose victim is none other than Elena herself: "[l]a realidad es interminable y se transforma y parece un relato donde todo siempre vuelve a empezar," he tells Junior, going on to add that "[s]ólo ella sigue ahí, igual a sí misma, quieta en el presente, perdida en la memoria. Si hay un crimen, ése es el crimen" (151). The creation of a linguistic utopia, which cheats death by transmuting reality into an eternal *relato* in which all things will perpetually recur, is only achievable by grounding this reality in the body of an individual (that of Elena in *La ciudad ausente*, that of the philosopher Nietzsche in Klossowski) who pays for this success by sacrificing the lucidity of her thought to the jubilant delirium of a discourse unmoored from the self.

PART III: IMPULSES, PHANTASMS, SIMULACRA, AND THE NIETZSCHEAN "ECONOMY OF THE SOUL"

Early in his interview with Junior, Russo provides a brief definition of the *relato*. "Un relato no es otra cosa que la reproducción del orden del mundo en una escala puramente verbal. Una réplica de la vida, si la vida estuviera hecha sólo de palabras" (139). He then adds an important caveat, citing the words of his friend Macedonio: "[p]ero la vida no está hecha sólo de palabras,

está también por desgracia hecha de cuerpos, es decir, decía Macedonio, de enfermedad, de dolor y de muerte" (139). By highlighting the fraught nature of the relationship between the affective experience of the body and its reproduction on a verbal scale in the *relato*, Macedonio approaches what for Klossowski is a key distinction in Nietzsche's thought: Nietzsche, like Macedonio, insists that the translation of bodily experience into symbolic language is ruled by a logic of deception and falsification. For Nietzsche, as Klossowski puts it, "[w]e are only a succession of *discontinuous states* in relation to *the code of everyday signs*, and about which *the fixity of language* deceives us" (41). To think is to submit the discontinuous intensities of the body to the inertia of language, and the entirety of conscious life rests on this impoverishing process of immobilization: "[c]onsciousness itself *constitutes this code of signs* that inverts, falsifies and filters what is expressed through the body" (26). For Klossowski, the entirety of Nietzsche's philosophical project is aimed at overcoming this gulf separating the impulses from the code of signs: "[his] obsessive thought had always been that events, actions, apparent decisions, and indeed the entire world have a completely different aspect from those they have taken on, from the beginning of time, in the sphere of language" (251). The delirious culmination of this project registered in Nietzsche's writings in the months leading up to his breakdown marks, for Klossowski, the "miraculous irony" of its success: "the *fixity of signs … no longer exists*" (252) as the philosopher lives the absolute coincidence of the intensities and a now-unmoored linguist sign.

In *Nietzsche*, Klossowski addresses the philosopher's lifelong search for means to overcome this opposition by proposing a conceptual framework that his English translator, Daniel J. Smith, describes as the "the implicit model through which [Klossowski] interprets Nietzsche's thought" (8): a "tripartite economy of the soul" structured around the concepts of the

impulse, the *phantasm*, and the *simulacrum*. As Smith explains, for Klossowski the word "soul" resonates with Christian mystic thought, where the soul is conceived as an inaccessible core whose essence is unavailable to the human intellect, and which can only be comprehended indirectly, as a reflection of the transcendence of God. In Nietzsche, this inaccessible core is not occupied by "God," but by the incommunicable impulses or drives that govern the human body, "their fluctuations of intensity, their rises and falls, their manic elations and depressive descents, which are in constant variation" (9).

These impulses of this Nietzschean soul, which form the inner core of the tripartite economy driving his thought, generate obsessional images that Klossowski calls "phantasms." As Smith explains, the Nietzschean phantasm it is not a substitution formation, as it is in Freudian psychoanalysis, but rather, in the words of Jean-François Lyotard, "'something' that grips the wild turbulence of the libido, something it invests as an incandescent object" (quoted in Smith 13). Examples of such incandescent objects include the phantasm of the self—the substance supposed to underlie, and unify, the body's chaotic play of impulses—, as well as the vision of the eternal return as it irrupts in Nietzsche's life experience. Importantly, the phantasm is not definable in terms of any possible "reality principle" supplied by consciousness. It originates not in the conscious self's experiences of reality, but rather from the intensive and inaccessible depths of the body; as Smith puts it, "[u]nintelligibility, incommunicability, and obsession are themselves the intensive components of Klossowski's concept of the phantasm" (13).

The simulacrum, finally, is "a willed reproduction of a phantasm (in a literary, pictorial, or plastic form) that simulates this invisible agitation of the soul" (Smith 16). It is something like a mask that is utilized to simulate the incommunicable and un-representable phantasm, and it

relies on visual and/or verbal semiotic systems (which Klossowski calls "stereotypes," and also the "code of everyday signs") to clothe its invisible power in a communicable form. Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche consistently differentiates between two distinct categories of simulacra. On the one hand, the intellect produces a species of disavowed simulacrum (a simulacrum that is passed off as "objective" or "real") by submitting its phantasms to the governing reality principles of science and morality. Nietzsche contrasts these "intellectual" simulacra to the simulacra produced by art. While art cannot faithfully reproduce a phantasm (to produce simulacra is, fatally, to falsify the body's impulses), it *does* enter into a qualitatively different relationship with it: "through its conventional procedures, *art* essentially reconstitutes in its own figures the conditions that have constituted the phantasm, namely, the intensities of the impulses" (134). By passing its primordial material (the phantasm) through the principle of form, the artistic simulacrum, "in relation to the intellect, is the license that the latter concedes to art: a *ludic* suspension of the reality principle" (134).

In this sense, the artistic simulacrum stands in perpetual opposition to the simulacra of the intellect, including all those simulacra produced by modern science: whereas science "[denies] intention [and] *compensates* for it in a beneficial and *efficacious* activity" (140) by smoothing out the turbulence of the impulses for the good of the social herd, art remains faithful to what for Nietzsche is the primordial function of the simulacrum: "*to lead human intention back to the intensity of forces*, which generate phantasms" (140). It is in this light that, for both Nietzsche and Macedonio, the scientist becomes such a crucial figure for their respective conspiracies: they both seek to reconvert science and art into "*dominant powers*, on the ruins of institutions" (145), which would work together toward this end of walking humanity back from

the governing rationality of modernity and back toward the intensive life of the forces that is, for Nietzsche, the only true plane of existence.

In a text titled "En otro país," written in the years when Piglia began preparing materials for his second novel, the author's narration of the life of a North American expatriate named Steve Ratliff gives way to a flow of *relatos* voiced by an impersonal, machine-like narrative entity that presages the storytelling machine in *La ciudad ausente*. That entity defines the process of narration in the following terms: "[n]unca sé si recuerdo las escenas o si las he vivido. Tal es el grado de nitidez con la que están presentes en mi memoria. Y quizá eso es narrar. Incorporar a la vida de un desconocido una experiencia inexistente que tiene una realidad mayor que cualquier cosa vivida. (43). The narrator of "En otro país" defines narration, in Klossowski's terms, as the exteriorization of a phantasm: an obsessional "something" grips the libido with an uncanny clarity, and to narrate is to incorporate this phantasm into the life of another through the production of an artistic simulacrum that reproduces its invisible power. It is precisely this model of narration that is preserved and situated at the heart of *La ciudad ausente*. In Junior's investigation of the mysterious machine, its origins and its mode of operation, he eventually unearths the story of an artist-inventor driven by his own personal phantasm: the experience of a reality unbounded by the (equally phantasmatic) fixity of the self, which leads to the project of building a machine that would incorporate that experience through the endless dissolution and re-articulation of *relatos*, generating a network of stories that proliferates outward from its creator's phantasm.

Importantly, a third prominent storyline that weaves its way through *La ciudad ausente* directly addresses Nietzsche's obsessive pursuit of a language beyond the fixity of the linguistic sign. This story, transmitted in the form of an anthropological report written by a man named

Boas, recounts life on an island where the spoken language is subjected to random, sudden un-moorings in which the verbal signs utilized by the island's inhabitants rearrange themselves in alterations that should not be thought of as distinct languages, but rather as "*etapas* sucesivas de una lengua única" (120. This "language" includes elements of English, German, Sanskrit, Russian, and a list of other identifiable languages. This experience of language-as-flux grounds life on the island, structuring the inhabitants' experiences of time and space. Their notion of a frontier, for example, is a temporal one whose possibilities can be conjugated like the tenses of a verb, and the very idea of foreignness is inconceivable due to the way in which elements which were once outside of the linguistic system perpetually cross into the island's language.[125]

In its depiction of a world characterized precisely by the "miraculous" coincidence between affects and language, Boas's *relato* parodically inverts the Nietzschean pursuit of such an unmoored language, demonstrating that, at its limit, the idea of this linguistic utopia, must remain bounded by the logic of the phantasm. The inhabitants of the island, like Nietzsche, are gripped by the obsessive thought of a reality existing beyond the sphere of their language, and are just as convinced that their experience of language is fated to falsify this reality. On the island, the idea of *patria* or homeland is linked to each individual's birth language—"[l]os individuos pertenecen a la lengua que todos hablaban en el momento de nacer, pero ninguno sabe cuándo volverá a estar ahí" (122)—, and the manner in which each person's first experience of language is forever established in their psyche as an obsessional phantasm, shaping their rituals and relationship to the cosmos. Their linguistic sciences, in fact, are entirely devoted to a goal

[125] The name of the island, as it appears in Boas's report, is Finnegans Island, in reference to the fact that its inhabitants worship a single book, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which seems to cipher all linguistic possibilities because it is written in all languages. Their ideological tradition is based on an open-ended series of commentaries, including one that makes *Finnegans Wake* mirror the story of Elena and Macedonio by reading Joyce's novel as the extended message of a strangely robotic woman who has been abandoned on an island, "con las cintas rojas y los cables y el armazón metálico al sol" (134), and who, like Elena, transmits messages to her now-deceased husband.

that exactly inverts the philosophical project of Nietzsche. They aspire, above all, to achieve the *fixity* of the sign: "[d]urante generaciones … han trabajado en el proyecto de fijar un diccionario … Necesitan fijar un léxico bilingüe que permita comparar una lengua con otra" (124). Their endeavor is an ill-fated one, however, due to what Boas describes as "una experiencia temporal de la estructura. No han podido construir un lenguaje exterior al lenguaje de la isla, porque no *pueden imaginar* un sistema de signos que persista sin mutaciones" (126). While their ancestors have dreamt for generations of "un tiempo en que la lengua era un llano por el que se podía andar sin sorpresa" (127), the inhabitants of the island remain trapped within the horizon of a sign system that passes through an endless cycle of intensive, fluctuating states. To attain the fixity of the sign, for them, would be to fall into a state of delirium that stands opposed to, yet mirrors, the delirious culmination of Nietzsche's philosophical project.

In his reading of *La ciudad ausente*, Gareth Williams highlights the utopian possibilities opened up by Boas's report, emphasizing that the perpetual de-grounding of language "opens up a common grammar of experience that unveils the world as the coming into itself of constant ungroundedness" (166) and perhaps forms the grounds for a post-hegemonic "communitarian space that is anchored in radical difference and in the collective experience of constitutive negativity" (167). He goes on to emphasize, however, that while the reader glimpses in the pages of Boas's report "the nonfoundational telos of a posthegemonic world" (167) (which would be something like the ultimate aim of the Nietzschean conspiracy as documented by Klossowski), this world exists only as an absent space within the pages of Piglia's novel: the island is described indirectly by Boas, rather than visited by Junior or any other of the novel's characters. It comes to the reader as another transmission of the machine, taking its place in the infinite series composed of the machine's emissions. Idelber Avelar emphasizes the way in which the

embedded tales in *La ciudad ausente* take on an allegorical signification as "encrypted emblems of [Junior's] interpretative struggle facing Macedonio's machine and his own present" (110). In this light, the language spoken on the island can be taken to allegorize the language, or grammar, employed by the machine itself in its transmissions: the island's language, by "acumula[ndo] los residuos del pasado en cada generación y [renovando] el recuerdo de todas las lenguas muertas" (*La ciudad ausente* 121), annuls death (the idea of a dead language is impossible) in the same way that the machine annuls the death of Elena by submitting her story to its endless permutations.

PART IV: PIGLIA'S NEO-MACEDONIAN CONSPIRACY, OR, CONSPIRING AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM

In *La ciudad ausente*, the stories of Macedonio, Elena, and the island visited by Boas flow into each other like communicating vessels. While Junior's investigation of the machine links these stories together, interspersing between them a series of shorter vignettes that are meant to be understood as transmissions of Macedonio's machine, it is important to note that his search is not positioned as an overarching framework underneath which these diverse narrative instances are arranged. The novel rejects this option by repeatedly broaching the possibility that the story of Junior's investigation *itself* may be transmitted to the reader as nothing more than one additional series of transmissions. At the close of his interview with Junior, Russo explains that Junior can draw his investigation to a close, because the machine has already replicated each and every step of his search, including their current conversation. *La ciudad ausente* is a novel, in short, that is both *about* the machine and *is* the machine described in its pages. The figure of the machine within the novel stands as a metonym for the novel itself, and, as Williams emphasizes, the novel, by folding these fragmentary storylines into the workings of the machine, uses the

machine to "tell its own story: the story of the generation of stories within the contemporary grounds of fragmentation, disconnectedness, and exhaustion" (161).[126] This double status of the novel makes necessary the conversion of its author (or, alternately, the inventor, of the machine that emitted the stories contained in *La ciudad ausente*) into a sort of neo-Macedonian (and thus neo-Nietzchean) conspirator whose invention repeats the conspiracy depicted in the novel's pages. To fully understand the stakes of this repetition, it is necessary to return once more to the pages of *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, setting Klossowski's bringing-up-to-date of Nietzsche's philosophy in dialogue with Piglia's own actualization of the conspiratorial legacy of the avant-garde, to respond to a set of new conditions related to the historical moment of the late 20th century.

As Klossowski reconstructs the vision of modernity within which Nietzsche's conspiracies take on meaning, he also relates Nietzsche's conspiratorial thought to the social context of the 1960s, which for Klossowski is dominated by the phenomenon of industrialism. For Klossowski, industrialism can be defined as "a concrete form of the *most malicious caricaturization* of [Nietzsche's] doctrine," in which "the regime of the Return has been installed as the 'productive' existence of humans who never produce anything but a state of *strangeness* between themselves and their life" (171). While Nietzsche's conspiratorial projects prophesized

[126] Due to its prevalence in Piglia's texts, at the level of form and of content, the figure of the machine has gained a strategic prominence in the critical literature. Edgardo Berg, for example, associates the narrative poetics of Piglia with "el funcionamiento de una máquina narrativa, como un *ars* combinatoria que puede realizar todas las mutaciones posibles sobre un material preexistente" (*Poéticas* 44). This postulation of the text as machine encourages readings that privilege questions concerning how the text works over traditional hermeneutic strategies of searching for meaning. As Berg notes, Elena, the machine at the center of *La ciudad ausente*, itself encourages this critical adjustment when the doctor who is interrogating it/her asks her, "¿Qué es ser una máquina" (68), and she responds, "Nada … Una máquina no es; una máquina funciona" (68). As readers of Piglia would note, the conversation paraphrases a famous passage from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* concerning questions of meaning in psychoanalysis: "[t]he unconscious poses no problem of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather "*How does it work?* How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work—yours and mine?" (108).

the advent of a new human type, the further development of industrialism, for Klossowski, has given the lie to his prophecy: the decades following Nietzsche's experience at Sils-Maria did not see the emergence of a new type of human, but rather the consummation of the eternal return in and through the infinite proliferation of industrial methods of producing the commodity-objects that, as Marx already understood in the first chapter of *Capital*, had come to constitute the beating heart of modern society. In this sense, while Nietzsche spoke of the superhuman, "[he] should have said: the *inhuman*" (171): a new human type did not constitute itself from the delirious ashes of the eternal return; rather, an inhuman industrialism came to dominate humanity through the delirious articulation of industrial methods into the very gregarious impulses that Nietzsche abhorred. This delirious proliferation of industrial methods of fabrication produced, in the end, "a new and totally amoral form of gregariousness … the 'super-gregarious'—the Master of the Earth" (171).

In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia repeats this structure of retrospection by positioning the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s, and also the global reemergence of liberalism from the ashes of the crises of the first half of the 20th century, as events that mark the catastrophe of the anti-liberal conspiracies of Macedonio and the historical avant-garde. This means the "Estado," which in *La ciudad ausente* is always bathed in the abstract, general light conferred by the word's capitalization, is situated between the "classical" liberal state targeted by Macedonio's anti-liberal conspiracies in the early decades of the 20th century, the totalitarian state whose rise Piglia witnessed in the 1970s and 80s, and the emergent neoliberal state of the 80s and 90s. It is an amalgamation of these three historically-grounded state-forms, which are united under liberalism's maximalist drive to enact absolute consensus through the total suppression of exceptions to its logic. As Russo emphasizes, the success of this endeavor would

amount to the foundation of "[e]l Estado mental, la realidad imaginaria, todos pensamos como ellos piensan y nos imaginamos lo que ellos quieren que imaginemos" (144). Importantly, if Macedonio comprehended this tendency and envisaged the machine as a means to resist it, he, like Nietzsche, was unable to foresee the later triumph of his principal adversary. In Piglia's novel this adversary is is marked by the totalitarian regimes of the later decades of the 20th century and their delirious application of methods of torture, which point to a vanishing point where the state has become, like Macedonio's machine, a machine for reproducing the stories of its citizens: "[e]l Estado conoce todas las historias de todos los ciudadanos y retraduce esas historias en nuevas historias que narran el Presidente de la República y sus ministros. La tortura es la culminación de esa aspiración al saber" (143). *La ciudad ausente* thus re-occupies the position occupied by Klossowski in Nietzsche: both books are written in the wake of a "super-gregarious" triumph (Klossowski's "industrial society," Piglia's "Estado"), and both seek new means for continuing to resist these dynamics once the extent of this triumph is fully recognized and comprehended.

Piglia's 2002 essay "Teoría del complot" addresses these issues directly, taking Klossowski's interpretation of Nietzsche's breakdown as "el anuncio de la inminencia de una catástrofe" (43) as his starting point for a comprehensive vision of the fate of the avant-garde at the turn of the 21st century. The catastrophe, for Piglia, is that of the avant-garde's conspiratorial project against liberalism, which fails in the wake of a resurgent neoliberalism and a cultural postmodernism that, from the point of view of conservative academic Daniel Bell (whom Piglia considers the most prescient theorist of postmodernism), emerges precisely to accompany and legitimize neoliberalism's triumph. As Piglia puts it, "ese anuncio que Klossowski lee en la enfermedad y en el aislamiento extremo de Nietzsche en Turín es un efecto del triunfo del

cálculo económico por encima de cualquier poder, la maquinación económica como práctica que se realiza en otra dimensión e invierte las predicciones de Nietzsche" (43). The Nietzschean conspiracy of experimentally isolating exceptional individuals to work toward "la constitución de una nueva clase de sujeto" (49) is betrayed by the neoliberal economy, "[que] se ocupa de hacer eso de un modo invertido, esto es, de extirpar a esos mismos sujetos y de anularlos" (49).

Piglia's objective in "Teoría del complot" is to survey this wreckage by tracing a genealogy of Nietzsche's 20th-century followers, attempting to discover in their works the bases of a renewed, anti-(neo)-liberal conspiracy. To do so, he situates Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche within a genealogy of theoretical texts that elaborate a critique of the economic dynamics of liberalism and neoliberalism by revealing the libidinal processes of desire that secretly drive the purportedly rational decisions of economic actors. While the economic rationality of neoliberalism tends to situate "el beneficio, la circulación del dinero, la ganancia, como formas visibles de su funcionamiento," these visible forms, as Piglia explains, conspire to obscure a secret libidinal core composed of a "red hecha de adicciones y de ideas fijas y fetiches, de bienes sagrados y de carencia absolutas" (58). Desire, on this model, secretly conspires against neoliberalism's drive to incorporate all aspects of life into the overarching principle of general equivalence by laying bare the irrational, pulsating knot of desires situated at its core. Piglia gives pride of place to a 1938 class dictated by Georges Bataille at the Collége de Sociologie, in which Bataille, highlighting the proliferation of secret societies in modern writers such as the Marquis de Sade, proposes that micro-groups of conspirators can harness energies to modify the social structures of the industrialized world by forming themselves around a "una contraeconomía, una economía pulsional, una economía de gasto y de goce" (57). *Teoría del complot* re-reads the history of 20th century avant-garde art, literature, and theory within this

theoretical framework: artists such as Macedonio, Roberto Arlt, and Witold Gombrowicz, among others, conceive of art as a conspiratorial activity of constructing works that, like Bataille's secret societies, generate "una economía propia" (58), driven by libidinal or Dionysian dynamics of desire and excess. To recur once more to Klossowski's vocabulary, they produce so many artistic simulacra that they give form to the phantasm of a libidinal "body" whose impulses secretly govern the visible functioning of the (neo)-liberal economy.

This reading of the presence of Klossowski's *Nietzsche* in Piglia's theory of the conspiracy has endeavored to show that Piglia's second novel can be situated in this context, as a counter-conspiracy against neoliberalism and its own "super-gregarious" conspiracy to reduce life to the economic principle of general equivalence. The pages of *La ciudad ausente* at once revisit and re-write the legacy of Macedonio Fernández, the author who is the founding figure in what Piglia deciphers as an Argentine tradition of anti-liberal conspiracies dating back to the turn of the 20th century, and actualize his legacy in light of the postwar resurgence of liberalism that he studies in "Teoría del complot." This dual project can be understood as secretly underwritten by Piglia's decades-long dialogue with Klossowski, who organizes his study of Nietzsche under the sign of the conspiracy. In Klossowski's Nietzsche, Piglia encounters a conspiratorial imperative—"Hay que construir un complot contra el complot" (3), as the heading of the 2002 version of "Teoría del complot" reads—that leads him to reinterpret the history of the avant-garde from the standpoint of a historical conspiracy against liberalism. His second novel, in turn, uses this theory of the conspiracy as the neo-avant-garde standpoint for its reflections on literature and resistance in the waning years of the 20th century.

CONCLUSION: ON THE "WHEN" OF AUTONOMY IN THE CYCLE OF ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

The dominant tendency in Piglia scholarship, and in Piglia's own presentation of his work, has been to incorporate the two stages delimited here into a single, progressively unfolding project. The dual emergence in the 1980s, of the figure of Macedonio and of the notion of the conspiracy, has been amply noted by critics such as Jorge Fornet, who describes an "inusual círculo virtuoso" (147) through which Macedonio's writings, which had for years been ignored by left-wing readers for their self-referentiality and lack of political commitment, suddenly become visible from the standpoint of the conspiracy as *the* foundational author of the Argentine tradition. As Fornet goes on to explain, "[Piglia], al asumir la teoría del complot, 'descubre' a Macedonio y nos obliga a leerlo de modo inesperado, como si se tratara de un precursor, hasta el punto de que por momentos parece desplazar a Arlt y a Borges" (148). This process, however, which Fornet describes as one of displacement, can also be understood in terms of a significant act of subsumption: of Arlt, of the revolutionary framework of the 1970s, *and* of the entirety of the Argentine literary tradition. In Piglia's writings over the course of the 1980s, each of these elements is made to take its place within the conspiratorial horizon that Piglia increasingly identifies with the history of the (anti-liberal) avant-garde. With Arlt, the task is a simple one: his novels, and especially *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas*, are constructed around conspiracy plots, and when Piglia returns to them in the mid-1980s, he sees that Arlt, like Macedonio before him, has converted the conspiracy into "la clave de la interpretación de la sociedad" (*Crítica* 38). Moving from the particular to the general, Piglia then reads Arlt's novelistic conspiracies back against the whole of the Argentine literary tradition, revisiting classic 19th-century texts such as Sarmiento's *Facundo* and José Mármol's *Amalia*, written during the years of the Rosas dictatorship by dissident liberal writers. This allows him to see that Arlt's conspiracies renew,

and deepen, one of the (if not *the*) foundational tendency in Argentine literature: by identifying the conspiracy as a key for interpreting society, "Arlt profundizó, diría yo, una gran tradición de la literatura argentina" (38). In this light, a scene in *Los lanzallamas* where Erdosain and the Astrólogo visit a cell of anarchist conspirators who are printing counterfeit money in the heart of Buenos Aires can be read back against Sarmiento's *Facundo*, and the acts of plagiarism and falsification that characterize both works can be incorporated into the conspiracy plot as the foundational fiction of the Argentine tradition. Much of Piglia's work in the 1980s has to do with subsuming the entirety of this tradition under the figure of Macedonio, and under the historical project of the avant-garde.

These pages have argued that this act of subsumption, in which Piglia's conception of literature as falsification is more or less smoothly inserted into the conspiracy-plot nucleus of his later theory of the avant-garde, occludes what is here conceived as a radical break between two historical horizons: that of a revolutionary avant-garde dedicated to annihilating bourgeois conceptions of literature grounded in idealist notions of autonomy, and that of a "postmodern" conspiracy that follows in Nietzsche's footsteps by asserting the possibility of an autonomous standpoint with respect to an increasingly totalitarian sociopolitical field, and using that standpoint as a starting point for a conspiratorial attack on the social totality. In concluding, I propose that the distinction I have made between these two horizons can be understood in terms of the question of *when* the moment of literature's autonomy occurs. The two periods discussed in these pages share an expansive vision of literature's near-total heteronomy with respect to the conditions of modern life, and they share an understanding of literature as fully submerged in cycles of capitalist production and social reproduction. They differ, however, in their understanding of when, in the production cycle that stretches from the work's pre-history (when

the author envisions and conceptualizes the still-nonexistent work) to the moment of the consumption of the completed work by its eventual readers, literature is able to momentarily pierce this condition of heteronomy.

In the negative poetics of citation that guides Piglia's project for a revolutionary avant-garde, autonomy comes at the end of the productive cycle. The artist, enmeshed in society's material base, works as a producer, mounting together patchworks of citations and systematically undermining the idealist conception of literature as the series of masterpieces produced by the progression of individuals whose original works of genius express the spiritual progression of humanity itself. The writer, as producer, forms part of the relations of production that define human social existence, and her acts of citation are subversive in the sense that they undermine the institutionalized autonomy of literature. They are meant to slowly but surely dissolve literary production into generalized processes of social production. As the above pages have argued, however, this conquest of absolute heteronomy cannot be understood as the ultimate objective of the project that reaches its climax in "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt." That project culminates, rather, in the provocation of an experience of autonomy in which the work of art momentarily jolts the reader or viewer out of her imaginary relationship to the real conditions of her life, to recall once again the Althusserian understanding of ideology. An experience of autonomy from the machinations of ideology occurs at the very end of the productive cycle, at the moment of consumption, as the literary work enacts a momentary rupture within the ideologically saturated consciousness of the reader.

Piglia's theory of the conspiracy, on the other hand, shifts the question of autonomy to a sequence of two moments that occur at the beginning of the production cycle, during what can be thought of as the pre-history of the work of art. In the first place, the anti-liberal projects of

artist-conspirators such as Nietzsche and Macedonio hinge on experiences of life beyond the bounds of liberal modernity which necessity precede the formulation of the conspiracy. In Nietzsche's experience of the eternal return, and in Macedonio's vision of the universe as an "almismo ayoico," each writer fleetingly occupies a position on the outside of the social totality. It is these experiences that catalyze the subsequent formulation of conspiracies against the expansive social herd. In the second place, the conspiratorial plans that are fomulated in the wake of these experiences *also* precede the production of the work of art, and in fact come to stand in for it. Piglia's gradual re-framing of the legacy of the avant-gardes of the 19th and 20th centuries increasingly tends to identify the historical project of the avant-gardes with its intervention into the institutional pre-conditions of the work of art, rather than the elaboration of works themselves. His clearest statement to this effect comes toward the end of *Teoría del complot*, where he insists that:

> En definitiva, el complot vanguardista parte de la hipótesis de que el valor no es un elemento interno, inmanente [a la obra], sino que hay una serie de tramas sociales previas sobre las cuales el artista también debe intervenir. Y que esas tramas definen lo artístico, son lo artístico. Por eso, a menudo, la práctica de la vanguardia consiste en construir la mirada artística y no la obra artística. Es lo que, obviamente, han hecho Duchamp o Macedonio. (39)

These statements provide the clearest illustration of what I argue is an irreducible tension that is preserved across the two stages in Piglia's literary project. On the one hand, there is a tendency to completely reduce the avant-garde's historical importance to its intervention into the institutional framework within which works of art are produced and consumed in liberal societies: those frameworks define the artistic, they simply *are* the artistic. On the other hand,

however, Piglia's discussion of the avant-garde conspiracy repeatedly resists this reduction through the use of words like *también* and *a menudo*. If there is an entire framework of social relations into which the artist *also* must intervene, this implies that the artist's work is not wholly reducible to those acts of intervention; and if the practices of the avant-garde *frequently* consist of the construction of the artistic gaze rather than the construction of the work of art, this implies that they are not entirely reducible to those processes of construction, in which the conspiratorial artist creates the standpoint from which as-yet nonexistent works of art can be viewed.

Thus, if Piglia's theory of the conspiracy tends at moments such as these toward the absolute identification of the avant-garde with the formulation of conspiratorial plots to intervene into the social totality, in which the conquest of autonomy not only precedes the creation of the work of art, but tends to cancel out the necessity of the work itself, Piglia must nonetheless complement this emphasis on the pre-history of artistic creation with a renewed conceptualization of the work of art. In the final pages of *Teoría del complot*, this is done via a definition of the work in terms of its creation of libidinal counter-economies in which "cada cosa vale lo que uno dice que vale" (59). These counter-economies function by exacerbating, on the interior of the work itself, the rationality of the (neo-)liberal economy, "hac[iendo] una exaltación de la noción de crisis como punto de ruptura del funcionamiento normal del sistema" (59). And importantly, this renewed understanding of the importance of the work of art, which Piglia does not bring back to bear on his demotion of the work in favor of the construction of the artistic gaze, ultimately reinstates the Althusserian emphasis on how art enacts a displacement on the interior of the ideological consciousness, allowing the viewer of the completed work to "see" or "perceive" the workings of ideology.

What Bataille, Klossowski, and Macedonio, not to mention Piglia himself, are doing when they create these artistic counter-economies is constructing works of art that aspire to culminate in "un momento en el que se ve funcionar aquello que no es tan racional, como a primera vista el sistema parece querer decir" (59). As in Althusser, the work of art is defined in terms of its capacity to enact an internal displacement, which allows one to see the functioning of the social system. And, as was the case with Macedonio's *conmoción conciencial*, discussed in Chapter 1, the moment of this displacement is unpredictable, existing as a virtual possibility: while it *may* take place during a future reading of the completed work, one cannot point to a specific place in the work where it *will* occur. It is made possible by the artist's thorough working-through of her (always-ideological) materials. In Piglia's case, this takes place through a rigorous and systematic use of a negative poetics of citation grounded in the Marxian critique of private property ("Homenaje a Roberto Arlt"), or a similarly systematic application of Klossowski's tripartite economy of the soul to the workings of the literary machine at the heart of *La ciudad ausente*. In each case, the work prepares its eventual reader for a fleeting vision of the world from outside of the machinations of the ideological consciousness.

The moment of separation—of critical distance, or of autonomy with respect to the social totality—thus paradoxically occurs at both the beginning and the end of the artistic process. If Piglia continues throughout his career to emphasize the radical heteronomy of art, conceiving the artist as a producer who is fully enmeshed in society's material base *and* in the workings of ideology at every moment of the process through which works of art are produced and consumed, he also arrives at these two opposed understandings of how art can nonetheless aspire to produce fleeting moments of separation on the interior of what Nietzsche would conceive as the "super-gregarious" neoliberal societies of the close of the 20th century.

Conclusion: Once Again, in a Borgesian Key

Rancière, as he carries out his first major revision of European literary history in the pages of *Mute Speech*, concludes a chapter devoted to a reading of Honoré de Balzac's 1839 novel *The Country Parson* with an aside concerning Jorge Luis Borges. There is no doubt, Rancière explains, that Borges would vehemently object to Balzac's flimsy arrangement of story, plot, and message. *The Country Parson*, it seems, "[leaves itself] particularly exposed to Borges's mocking of improbable psychology and poorly constructed plots in nineteenth-century novels, which he contrasts with the tightly bound together stories in Henry James or Bioy Casares" (108). His comment clearly alludes to the argument made by Borges in his prologue to Adolfo Bioy Casares's 1940 novel *La invención de Morel*. In that prologue, Borges condemns the novels of Dostoyevsky and Proust, among others, due to their inattention to the construction of well-formed plots, and champions *La invención de Morel* as a novel whose plot is so precisely assembled that, as Borges puts it in the closing words of the prologue, "no me parece una imprecisión o una hipérbole calificarla de perfecta" (5). This conclusion will use Rancière's reading of Borges, in both *Mute Speech* and in a later essay titled "Borges and French Disease" (published in *The Politics of Literature*) as a means to re-formulate and tie together the claims made in this dissertation's previous chapters.

For Rancière, in a word, Borges's understanding of literature collapses the central contradiction that exists at the heart of the aesthetic regime of art, the contradiction between absolute necessity and absolute indifference, or between the "absolute singularity of art" and the absence of "any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 23). The following pages explain how, in Rancière's reading, Borges is able to accomplish this via what

Rancière describes as a "radicalized Aristotelianism" (*Politics of Literature* 133). What Borges develops, if one follows the reading proposed by Rancière, is a notion of literature grounded in strong assertions of medium-specificity and autonomy, in which the well-formed plot at the heart of every effective story constitutes literature's innermost quality (that which grants it its singularity), and the essentially artificial nature of this well-ordered story guarantees literature's autonomy from the disorder of life. In this sense, Borges' approach to literature occupies a formally similar position to that occupied by Clement Greenberg's theory of modernism in Rancière's most recent major work on art in the aesthetic regime, *Aisthesis*, which was studied in the closing section of Chapter 1: Borges, like Greenberg, turns his back on what Rancière conceives as the true movement of the aesthetic regime. Importantly, as the following pages will emphasize, the novels of both Macedonio and Arlt are implicated in this collapse of the Rancièrian contradiction between necessity and indifference; in this light, in an important sense, Borges's approach to literature makes it impossible to read either of the authors studied in this dissertation's first two chapters.

Rancière's reading of Borges is a surprising one that cuts against the grain of many critical commonplaces regarding Borges's oeuvre. Generations of readers have encountered in Borges a thinker of the singular, the irreducible, and the infinite, a writer who identifies the "perilous dignity" of literature, in the words of Maurice Blanchot, with how it "makes us experience the approach of a strange power, neutral and impersonal" (95) that perpetually ruins the pretensions to universal order encoded in theoretical constructs such as the idea of God as "a great author of the world" (95). Rancière too encounters at the heart of Borges's understanding of literature a strange and impersonal power, but he sees it as a will to *order* manifested in the well-shaped form of the Borgesian text. My aim here is not to defend the correctness of one

interpretation or the other—Rancière's Borges will not be taken here as *the* Borges, but as one possible Borges—, but rather to pursue some of the implications of Rancière's reading. In particular, I argue that Rancière offers a highly plausible, and significant, explanation as to why Borges rejected (or would have rejected) the lengthy novels of Arlt and Macedonio, just as much as he expressed a well-known distaste for the novels of Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and Proust. At the same time, I will show that Rancière's own commitments to authors such as these, who embody in his works the true movement of the aesthetic regime of art, makes him symmetrically unable to read authors such as Borges and Clement Greenberg, whose understandings of the dynamics of artistic and literary modernity are demoted to a secondary and inessential position.

The second part of this conclusion will use Rancière's reading of Borges as a means to re-frame Piglia's decades-long literary project. Piglia, I will propose, passes Macedonio and Arlt's respective literary projects through a Borgesian gauntlet and encounters ways of re-opening the paths that Borges closes off. He does so by constructing what Edgardo Berg describes as a "máquina de lectura" in which, parting from Piglia's original reading of Borges (a reading which, as the following pages will propose, can be made to hew close to Rancière's own positions), his literary project unfolds in a process of perpetual re-incorporation of the very elements of disorder and indifference that the Borgesian well-formed text seeks to conjure away. Berg describes this procedure in the following terms: "[u]nir y reposicionar líneas y puntos de fuga, construir genealogías y familias 'monstruosas,' no es fácil desembarazarse por los injertos de esos cuerpos textuales de la imagen del Doctor Viktor Frankenstein. Borges y Arlt, Borges y Gombrowicz, Borges y Puig, Piglia hace injertos y cruzas imposibles para la lógica de lo claro y distinto" ("Ricardo Piglia" 49). By reframing Piglia's neo-Arltian and neo-Macedonian moments as "monstrous" grafts onto a Borgesian trunk, this conclusion ultimately identifies the

contradictory ways in which, at the close of the 20th century, Piglia's literary project re-activates a series of possibilities opened by his avant-garde forebears, possibilities which are ultimately made visible through Rancière's revision of aesthetic modernity.

"Radicalized Aristotelianism": Borges in the Aesthetic Regime of Art

Borges's defense of *La invención de Morel* takes the form of a comprehensive refutation of the essay "Ideas sobre la novela," written by José Ortega y Gasset and published fifteen years prior to Borges's prologue.[127] For Ortega y Gasset, the history of the novel can be understood in terms of an evolution from a "primitive" emphasis on plot, or the "narración de peripecias" (393), to the modern novel's near-exclusive focus on the rigorous presentation of characters immersed in the minutiae of day-to-day life, or the "análisis microscópico de almas humanas" (403-4). Ortega y Gasset proposes that this shift from plot-based to character-based novels has occurred for three interrelated reasons. He describes the first in terms of a practical impossibility: in 1925, almost all of the good plots seem to have already been invented, and it is increasingly difficult to create stories for readers who have, so to speak, heard it all before. The second stems from the fact that, in addition to this exhaustion of good stories, readers are simply tired of reading plot-based novels, *period*, even if the story is good: decades of exposure to plot-heavy serial novels that are characterized by constant (and increasingly predictable) twists has led modern readers to desire pleasures other than the "apasionamiento mecánico" (393) that novelistic plots induce through their generation of constant suspense. Third, and finally, present-day readers have discovered a new source of aesthetic pleasure in the novels of Dostoyevsky, Proust, and others. This pleasure,

[127] To clarify: in his prologue, Borges cites Ortega y Gasset's *La deshumanización del arte*, the lead essay of the 1925 volume that also included "Ideas sobre la novela." He is, however, clearly responding to "Ideas sobre la novela" throughout his essay.

which Ortega y Gasset conceives as the most authentically aesthetic experience that the modern novel can hope to produce, is generated through the reader's direct contemplation of characters' lives: "[n]os complace verlos directamente, penetrar en su interior, entenderlos, sentirnos inmersos en su mundo o atmósfera" (391).

Ortega y Gasset ultimately frames this epochal shift from "primitive" to "modern" novels within a teleological narrative of individual growth and maturation. The child will always be able to enjoy a good plot-centered adventure novel because her imagination allows her to paint a mental picture of the characters in vivid detail. Due to the fact that we as adults have lost this imaginative faculty, plot-centered novels can only appeal to the "niño interior que, en forma de residuo un poco bárbaro, todos conservamos" (393). Our "mature" aesthetic sensibility, in contrast, allows us to derive aesthetic pleasure from the intense, immersive experience provided by the novels of writers like Dostoyevsky: as we read the pages of his novels, "nos vamos saturando de sus almas, van adquiriendo las personas imaginarias una evidente corporeidad que ninguna definición puede proporcionar" (401). By extending this personal metaphor to the collective history of readers' reception of the novelistic genre as a whole, Ortega is able to propose that the mature readers of modern novels are no longer sensitive to the childish pleasures that readers of past centuries found in the plot-driven novels of the past. He thus argues that the modern novel encounters its raison d'etre in the presentation of the "puro vivir" of the character: "[l]a esencia de lo novelesco—adviértase que me refiero tan sólo a la novela moderna—no está en lo que pasa, sino precisamente en lo que no es 'pasar algo,' en el puro vivir, en el ser y el estar de los personajes, sobre todo en su conjunto o ambiente" (407). While the novel, according to Ortega y Gasset, can never *completely* eliminate the plot (and on this account he positions the novels of Proust as something of a cautionary tale), he insists over and over again that it must be

reduced to an absolute minimum, comparing it to the near-invisible string that sustains the pearls of a necklace, or the thin wires that support an open umbrella. He ultimately defines the modern novel as an essentially "dense" genre—a "género tupido" (413), in his words—characterized by skeletal plots accompanied by a near-hyperbolic proliferation of detail. In a formulation that, as the following pages will indicate, would surely be as abhorred by Borges as it would be embraced by Rancière, he insists near the end of his essay that "[l]as máximas novelas son islas de coral formadas por miríadas de minísculos animales, cuya aparente debilidad detiene los embates marinos" (414).

Borges's prologue explains that *La invención de Morel* is a great novel precisely because it is everything that these "máximas novelas" are not. In refuting Ortega y Gasset's thesis, Borges follows two lines of argumentation, describing one as intellectual, the other as empirical. The empirical argument is that, while many people complain about a general lack of interesting stories, the 20th century has in fact witnessed a veritable renaissance of storytelling in the literary arts. Citing Chesterton, Kafka, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and *La invención de Morel*, and highlighting the disingenuousness of Shakespeare and Cervantes (who enjoy making the reader believe that an unusually beautiful woman could easily and successfully pass herself off as a man), Borges insists that, "si alguna primacía tiene nuestro siglo, esa primacía es la de las tramas" (4). On this account, it seems to Borges, Ortega y Gasset is just plain wrong: the category of plot has itself undergone a process of evolution, and recent decades have seen some of the most rigorous, compelling plots in the genre's history.

The intellectual argument is that, as Borges puts it, "[l]a novela característica, 'psicológica,'" (3) defended by Ortega y Gasset tends toward two unsavory vanishing points. On the one hand, Dostoyevsky and his disciples have shown that, as Borges puts it, "nadie es

imposible" (3): from assassins driven by benevolence to men who commit suicide due to happiness, the past century has witnessed a veritable explosion of unlikely characters. However, this near-absolute creative liberty in the invention of characters (rather than plots), with little to no concern for the story that links the moments of their lives together, has caused the novel to tend toward an unpleasant formlessness: "[e]sa libertad plena acaba por equivaler al pleno desorden" (3). On the other hand, the emphasis on the rigorous, minute transcription of the character's experiences in the character-centered novels of Proust and others drives these novels towards an insipid realism. "[L]a novela '*psicológica*' quiere ser también novela '*realista*,'" (3), and this desire to blur the line between novel and reality is reprehensible in that it cancels out the innermost quality of the literary text: "su carácter de artificio verbal" (3). The plot-centered novel championed by Borges, in contrast, "no se propone como una transcripción de la realidad: es un objeto artificial que no sufre ninguna parte injustificada" (3). It is due to these dual tendencies toward formlessness and "realism" that Borges ultimately condemns the novels of Dostoyevsky, Proust, and their followers. Furthermore, it is due principally to the absence of unjustified elements that he can assert the perfection of the plot of *La invención de Morel*.

In his brief aside on Borges, Rancière reflects on the motivations behind Borges's condemnation of the coral-reef-like novels championed by Ortega y Gasset (whom Rancière does not mention). The following passage bears quoting at length due to the way that it will at once allow for a brief re-formulation of Rancière's vision of the contradictory poetics of aesthetic modernity, and will also establish the terms for the final pages of this dissertation:

> [T]he well-constructed fictions that [Borges] praises have a quite specific texture: they are fables of fiction, detective stories in which the secret is always the same because it is the fact of fiction itself, its way of constructing a secret, that is the

> last word. These fictions are demonstrations of the power of fiction. The opposition between representative logic and expressive logic is wiped out, as is the contradiction between the principles of expressive poetics: since the story is the confabulation of the power of fables, it smoothly combines the symbolic principle with the principle of indifference. It escapes representational "reportage" without ever getting lost in the infinity or indeterminacy of the symbol … The Aristotelian plot can be completely identified with Schlegel's "poetry of poetry," just as fictional convention can be identified with the treasury of the imagination and the virtuosity of the writer-magician with the impersonal fertility of fables. There is only one genre, the genre of the imaginary, upon whose infinite resources fabulating man draws for the use of his natural audience, fabulating man. (108)

Rancière's mention of "representative logic" refers back to the system of axioms that formed the normative framework of neoclassical aesthetics, a system which has as its cornerstone the man of action whose heroic deeds *and* speeches manifest the truth of the human world. According to the logic of representation, poetry can be defined as a "causal poetics of narration" (60), in which the speech of the man of action tells a well-formed story with a logical beginning, middle, and end. The expressive logic that progressively undermines this opposed representational logic is predicated instead on the equal capacity of all things (insignificant men and women, the stones of a cathedral, the objects for sale in an antique shop) to manifest that truth, which is mutely inscribed on their bodies. According to the logic of expression, poetry is a sort of second-order activity that re-inscribes an already-existing language imprinted on those things whose presence in the world the poem reproduces in words written on the page: "[the] consciousness inscribed in the language of poetic words is likewise found in the tools of agriculture, the institutions of law,

and the emblems of justice" (59). Borges's defense of well-constructed fictions collapses these two logics by making fiction itself (the "plot" or the "adventure") both the subject and the object of the literary text, and elevating the category of plot above that of character. Fiction, in the Borgesian short story, tells the tale of its own storytelling power, making irrelevant the question of whether only the "representative" man of action can manifest the truth of the world through his speech, or whether this truth rather sits mutely inscribed on all the things whose "expressive" qualities poetry redoubles in the space of the written page.

Borges thus erases the gulf separating representative and expressive logics, or what Rancière will in his later works call the "representative regime of the arts" and the "aesthetic regime of art." He also, however, erases the internal contradiction of the aesthetic regime itself by collapsing the two principles that are at its heart. When Rancière speaks of a symbolic principle, he refers to the way in which the logic of expression, by reconceiving poetry as "one particular manifestation of the poeticity of the world" (59), grants all words and things the power to reveal a hidden, supersensible realm that exists apart from the worldly realm of causes and effects. Citing an "apparently anodyne" sentence written by the German poet Novalis—"A child is a love made visible" (60)—, Rancière comments that "[w]hat this means, in its full generality, is that any effect is a sign that makes visible the hidden power of its cause" (60). The child is not the effect of a well-defined cause (her parents' act of procreation) but is instead an expression of the supersensible power of love. For Rancière, the transition from the causal poetics of the representative regime to the new expressive poetics "is completely contained within this displacement" (60). And, importantly, while the European Romantics generally conceive this "power of language, immanent in every object" (60) as a means of provoking mystical or spiritual experiences, Rancière stresses that it can equally be put to work in rationalist endeavors

to uncover the true functioning of human society. Balzac in his novels, but also Marxian social science and the historians of the influential *Annales* School in France, work from the same "expressive" standpoint, with the caveat that, for them, words and things express not spiritual truths but the hidden forces governing human social existence. When Marx beckons the readers of *Capital* to pass through the factory's doors and descend into the realm of production, insisting that the activities taking place in this realm express the truth of capitalist society, he is repeating a procedure already carried out in the novels of Hugo, Stendhal, and Balzac, which descend from the level of the man of action to encounter the truth of society expressed in the odds and ends of an antique shop or the stones of the Notre-Dame Cathedral. Whether the truths in question are spiritual or rational, the logic of expression grants all things and words a symbolic capacity to make visible the hidden powers governing life.

However, if each and every thing (and each and every word) *potentially* possesses this plenitude of expressive power, why *these* words, or *these* things? When Rancière speaks of the principle of indifference, he references the difficulty that arises when artists and critics attempt to conceptualize this symbolic power of language in terms of necessity. For, as Rancière explains, it is just as possible to point back to the understanding of writing voiced by Plato in the *Phaedrus* and argue that the written word does not manifest a hidden truth, but rather becomes progressively farther and farther *removed* from the truth as it circulates through the world like an orphan, away from the individual who sired it by putting pen to page. To return to the example of Novalis and his words about the child, one could say that it is through this process of dissemination that what began as a poetic expression of the hidden power of love progressively becomes a cliché—the fodder for tens of thousands of prosaic greeting cards that are mass-produced, sold, and gifted to new parents around the world. If writing may be capable of bearing

witness to the hidden powers guiding human life, it may also be nothing more than "a letter without a body that could vouch for its truth, [which] is thus available for any use and any speaker" (87). Rancière traces this "Platonic" fear of the cancellation of the expressive power of words by way of a never-ending production of indifference that saps words of this very power, to a series of attempts in European literature to reinstate hierarchies that would mark the difference between who is, and is not, able to properly use the written word: Flaubert's condemnation of Emma Bovary and Arlt's condemnation of moviegoers such as Erdosain both partake in this reactive endeavor to stem the implacable tide of indifferentiation.

The German romantics found a way of resolving this contradiction by producing a concept of the fragment as an "expressive unity" or "finite figure of an infinite process [of becoming]" (76) that allowed them, in turn, to define works of art as "garlands of expressive fragments, hieroglyphs of a natural and linguistic poem, moments of a *formation*, of the *Bildung* that creates images, forms, and possibilities of life" (77). The Romantic poem, by continually passing from one fragment to the next, perpetually remains a step ahead of the implacable process through which once-expressive words are sapped of their poeticity. At the opposite extreme, Flaubert's posthumously-published *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) dramatizes this implacable process of words becoming indifferent. In its concluding pages, as the titular characters sit at their copy desk, endlessly reproducing the words printed on the prosaic print materials of bourgeois society, the absolute way of seeing that Flaubert had erstwhile pursued in *Madame Bovary* "gives the final word to this stupidity, to the prose of the world that it had indiscernibly transfigured" (127). For Rancière, the European novel, following in the wake of Romanticism, is condemned to perpetually shift between these extremes: on the one hand, it repeatedly rehearses the Romantic notion of the poem as a garland of expressive fragments by

carrying out an "infinite repetition of the act that repoeticizes every prosaic thing" (84); on the other, it follows Flaubert down the path of indifferentiation, driving all the words and things of poetry to the point of "[dissolution] into the prose of the bourgeois world" (86).

Borges collapses this contradiction on the interior of the aesthetic regime by identifying the Romantic garland-of-fragments model for the work of art with the well-formed plot that is at the center of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In his fictions, each fragment of the Romantic garland becomes identical to a moment in the progressive unfolding of the plot, and each one is thus secured in a relation of necessity with the other moments that link the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Rancière emphasizes, however, that Borges's "radicalized Aristotelianism" cannot be understood as a simple, straightforward return to the old Aristotelian poetics of representation. Borges instead discovers a fold on the interior of the expressive regime by introducing a radically *impersonal* understanding of storytelling. The story (or what Rancière in his readings of Borges alternately calls the "tale" or "fable") becomes the product *not* of the man of action who preexists the Aristotelian work of art its necessary human author (and exists after it as its necessary reader or spectator), but of an impersonal will that, while it passes through author and reader, using them as vessels, is itself guiding the process from beginning to end. The Borgesian story, in effect, *tells itself to itself*, with the human author and reader shifted to the position of indirect objects. And what this will *wills* is nothing other than the well-formed story recommended by Aristotle, where the parts relate to the whole in a relation of organic unity:

> The tale is the result of a calculating will. This will selects whatever subject allows an optimization of effects, as opposed to the prolixity of lived details and uncertain psychological motives that characterizes the novel as a form. The tale is therefore the triumph of artifice over the improbable realism of the novel. This

> triumph of artifice corresponds to a radicalized Aristotelianism: it's the story that makes the poem, a story strictly conceived in Aristotelian terms: the constitution of a core that is unraveled in the play of episodes and recognition (133).

This identification of the tale with the artifice of an inhuman will allows the Borgesian story to avoid the twin pitfalls of losing itself in the indeterminate plenitude of the Romantic symbol and indifferently transcribing, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, "lo insípido y ocioso de cada día" (3). The triumph of the singular will-to-order of the story, which wants nothing more than to optimize the play of episodes and recognition, over the entropic will to *dis*order that, in Ortega y Gasset's essay, guides the coral-reef-like novels of Dostoyevsky and Proust into an endless proliferation of minuscule detail. At the same time, it prevents the flow of the story from stalling out in an eddy of absolute indeterminacy. By making the perfect artifice of the well-formed plot triumph over these dual bad infinities (the infinite dissolution of literature into prosaic life; the infinite plenitude of the symbol), Borges negates what Rancière describes as the very raison d'être of the modern novel, which hinges on preserving this tension between symbolic necessity and absolute indifference, and which Rancière considers the essential genre of the aesthetic regime due to the fact that it marks "the place where the contradiction between the old poetics and the new is aggravated by the contradiction internal to the new" (*Mute Speech* 109). [128]

[128] One could say that the central theme of Borges's "El Aleph" is precisely this subject, which is dealt with via a double depiction of the bad infinity in the forms of, respectively, the "symbolic" aleph itself (the simultaneous presentation of the entirety of the infinite world of things), and the "indifferent" book of poetry by Carlos Argentino Daneri, aptly titled *La tierra*, which endeavors to carry out a complete redoubling of the world in the words that fill the pages of the book. As Maurice Blanchot puts it in "Literary Infinity: The Aleph," Borges's story guides to the thought that "the world, if it could be exactly translated and copied in a book, would lose all beginning and all end and would become that spherical, finite, and limitless volume that all men write and in which they are written: it would no longer be the world; it would be, it will be, the world corrupted into the infinite sum of its possibilities. (This perversion is perhaps the prodigious and abominable Aleph)" (95). Blanchot and Rancière touch on similar dynamics in Borges's literary project, but push them in diametrically opposed directions. For Blanchot, "El Aleph" provokes an experience—which is in fact, "the very experience of literature" (93)—of the Hegelian bad infinity: "Borges understands that the perilous dignity of literature … [is to] make us experience the approach of a strange power, neutral and impersonal" (95). Or, as he later puts it, "[l]iterature is not a simple deception, it is the dangerous

In his readings of Borges, in both *Mute Speech* and in an essay-length piece titled "Borges and French Disease" included in *The Politics of Literature*, Rancière repeatedly contrasts Borges to authors who, like Ortega y Gasset, push their understanding of literature toward the opposite extreme: Walt Whitman, whose "unanimist and futurist profusion of lists [stands] opposed to the selectiveness and concision proper to [Borgesian] art" (*Politics* 130); Proust, the pages of whose novels, as Borges puts it in the prologue to *La invención de Morel*, "son inaceptables como invenciones" (3); and Flaubert, whose depiction of the copyists Bouvard and Pécuchet at their copy desk, "copy[ing] out anything that comes to hand" (*Politics* 140), would be condemned by Borges as a literary bad infinity marked by the absolute eclipse of the fable.

In this sense, Rancière situates Borges in a position similar to that occupied by Clement Greenberg in the discussion of modernist painting that is cited in the opening paragraph of this dissertation: Borges insists on the need to arrive at a medium-specific definition of literature, and arrives at such a definition by radically separating the Aristotelian well-formed story from its classical starting point, the man of action. He then uses this definition to re-tell the history of the modern novel as a history of autonomization in which the genre, after dissolving itself into the disorderly minutiae of characters' lives, progressively purifies itself of all the things that authors such as Dostoyevsky and Proust insisted on incorporating into its pages but which, from the perspective of a calculating will bent on optimizing the plot's effects, never really belonged there in the first place. The word that Borges uses to speak of autonomy is "artifice": the novels

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ability to go toward what exists, by the infinite multiplicity of the imaginary" (95). Rancière arrives at the exact opposite conclusion by essentially reading the form of "El Aleph" (its well-formed plot) back against its content: in his reading, literature does indeed exist because there is a strange, impersonal power, but this power is working to *conjure away* the threat of indeterminacy/symbolic plenitude by ordering events into plots such as the one which unfolds in the pages of "El Aleph."

championed by Ortega y Gasset "[p]refieren que olvidemos su carácter de artificio verbal" (3) yet are invalidated by the fact that literature *is* artifice and nothing more.

The point here is not necessarily to present Rancière's reading of Borges as an ideal or exemplary one; it is constructed from a relatively limited corpus of texts and could surely be critiqued from a variety of standpoints.[129] Rather, it is important to recognize how easily the novels of both Macedonio and Arlt can be made to fall victim to this radicalized Aristotelianism: if one accepts the general terms of Rancière's reading of Borges, a "Borgesian" reading of the two authors studied in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation would be something of a logical impossibility. The Borgesian condemnation of the character-centered modern novel of the type described by Ortega y Gasset helps shed light on some of the particular reasons why it would have been impossible for Borges to read the novels of either author. Macedonio's identification of the character as the constitutive element of the novelistic genre leads him, like Ortega y Gasset, towards a minimalist understanding of the relationship between plot and novel. He too sees that the idea of an absolutely plotless novel is impossible, and, while he proposes various means of satisfying the need for a minimal plot that could serve as the ultra-thin thread connecting his characters' mental states, his near-exclusive emphasis on character in his theory of the novel and in the pages of his *Museo* drive him to the opposite extreme from that occupied by Borges.[130]

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[129] To briefly sketch just one possible critique, one could quite easily read Piglia's "Tesis sobre el cuento" back against Rancière: where Rancière insists that for Borges "[t]here is only one genre, the genre of the imaginary" (*Mute Speech* 108), Piglia highlights a proliferating logic at the heart of Borges's use of genre: if in the Borgesian short story *the plot itself* is always the same (the short story tells the story of the construction of a secret story), then it is the very diversity of genres that underwrites this unity of plot: "[p]ara atenuar o disimular la esencial monotonía de esa historia secreta, Borges recurre a las variantes narrativas que le ofrecen todos los géneros" ("Tesis" 98).

[130] In recent decades, scholarly considerations of the relationship between Borges and Macedonio Fernández have increasingly followed a similar path as Rancière by tracing the ways in which Borges, in his endeavors to tame a will to disorder at the heart of the Macedonian literary project, collapses the very possibilities that Macedonio's literary project opens up. In general, these approaches part from a well-known fact highlighted by Oscar del Barco

Together, Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* and *Los lanzallamas* total around 600 pages of text (depending on the edition), and it is certainly difficult to imagine the two-novel series escaping Borges's condemnation of poorly constructed plots. Arlt, like Macedonio, exhibits a proclivity toward the microscopic analysis of his characters, inherited in part from the novels of Dostoyevsky that he read and commented on admiringly in his *aguafuertes*. For the reader to feel herself immersed in their world, to experience the "atmospheric" conditions of their lives: these are some of the central aspirations of the Arltian novel. Generations of readers have arrived at similar condemnations of Arlt's novels, and the idea that Arlt was simply unreadable for Borges and the other writers associated with the literary journal *Sur* has become a critical commonplace in Argentine literary studies. In light of Ortega y Gasset's "Ideas sobre la novela," it becomes increasingly clear why Borges would not have been amenable to Arlt's novels. His novels certainly do not reach Macedonian levels of plot-suppression, yet neither would they ever be mistaken for the tightly-bound plots that Borges champions. In this light, one can easily imagine Borges echoing a recurrent critique of Arlt's shoddy storytelling that is neatly expressed in a recent essay by Mario Vargas Llosa, who expresses skepticism concerning Arlt's "supuesta genialidad" (CITE) because, as he puts it, "era un pésimo prosista y un desastroso constructor de

in a 1985 essay: "[s]e sabe que a Borges no le gusta lo escrito por Macedonio; en numerosas ocasiones ha declarado que existen dos Macedonios: el mal escritor y el buen conversador" (464). Del Barco ultimately explains that Borges's rejection of Macedonio's textual corpus transcends psychological and sociological issues of personal taste, relating instead to what he calls the "problema fuerte de la *lectura*" (465; emphasis in original). Borges, in passing judgment on Macedonio (the writer), positions himself as not just one reader among many, but as the subject of what del Barco describes as a sort of Hegelian "sistema absoluto de lectura" (465) that, at the same time as it perpetually incorporates more and more material into itself (Carlyle, Henry James, Evaristo Carriego…), is nonetheless haunted by an initial distinction between that which is within the system and that which remains absolutely outside of it. Macedonio's writing is nothing other than this disavowed outside: "Borges es *el* lector que realiza un tipo de lectura propio de un orden determinado, y es en este orden donde se marca la especificidad del texto de Macedonio como su negativo" (465; emphasis in original). For a representative sampling of recent scholarship, see del Barco's "Macedonio o el milagro del ocultamiento," as well as Julio Prieto, *Desencuadernados: Vanguardias ex-céntricas en el Río de la Plata*, pp. 109-145; Ana Camblong, "De Macedonio a Borges un testamento lunático" and "Borges y Macedonio con ironía y humor"; Horacio González, *El filósofo cesante: Gracia y desdicha en Macedonio Fernández*, pp. 171-211; Todd Garth, *The Self of the City*, pp. 32-47; and Luis Othoniel Rosa's recent mongraph, *Comienzos para una estética anarquista: Borges con Macedonio.*

historias" (CITE). Of course, Piglia's reading of Arlt in *Respiración artificial* is predicated on turning these supposed vices into virtues. It is, however, hard to imagine Borges seeing them as such. He would be much more likely to assimilate them to his critique of Ortega's vision of the modern novel, which is conjured away by the perfect plot of *La invención de Morel*.

PIGLIA: FROM MACEDONIO AND ARLT TO BORGES, AND BACK AGAIN (AND AGAIN)

Put another way, Borges's refutation of Ortega y Gasset's thesis on the modern novel in the prologue to *La invención de Morel* can be made to echo the words of Leslie Fiedler, Roland Barthes, and others who collectively declared the death of the avant-garde at mid-century. The novels of Dostoyevsky and Proust, but also those of Arlt and Macedonio, transgress the classical insistence on a well-formed plot by filling the pages of their novels with things that, from the perspective of Borges, simply don't belong there. While the terms are different—Fiedler and Barthes speak of the avant-garde, and Borges (using scare quotes) speaks of the "psychological" and "realist" novel—they are all, in an important way, referring to the same sorts of transgressive tendencies in 19th-and-20th-century literature, and they are all interested in marking the limits of those disorderly tendencies, and asking what sorts of new principles of order might emerge to lead the way forward. This placement effectively situates Borges within the context discussed at the beginning of Chapter 3, allowing for a discussion of what light Rancière's reading of Borges can shed on the subject of that chapter, Ricardo Piglia's decades-long literary project. It bears remarking from the beginning that if Borges (or at least Rancière's version of Borges) would find himself categorically incapable of reading the poorly-constructed, character-centered novels of Macedonio and Arlt, Piglia comes of age at a time when young left-wing writers such as

himself had only recently become capable of reading Borges *at all*.[131] Piglia finds himself, in effect, in a position to work through the sorts of challenges that Borges's work poses to the novels of Arlt and Macedonio, seeking, like Barthes, a revolutionary rebirth of a historical movement (the avant-garde for Barthes, the modern, character-based novel for Borges) that seems to have met its demise.

To begin with, the progression of texts studied in the first part of Chapter 3, stretching from the publication of "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt" in 1975 to the release of *La ciudad ausente* seventeen years later, can now be re-conceived as a second-order Romantic poetics in which Piglia identifies the fragment *not* with each successive moment of a well-constructed plot, but with the plot itself, in its entirety: the pages of Piglia's novels form, as a whole, a garland of well-formed *relato*-fragments. In Piglia's poetics of the novel, the centrality of the concept of the *relato* (the fable or tale in Rancière's reading of Borges) as a sort of impersonal force driving literary production is well-known. Levinson's description of the *relato* as the "vehicle of relationality [that] carries Piglia's novel" (56) in which "[s]tories and life stories place subjects in contact with the Other, making more stories possible" (57), can in this sense be made to reproduce the Romantic emphasis on the fragment as a finite figure of an infinite process of becoming. In the pages of *Respiración artificial*, stories perpetually transmit themselves through one subject to another, making possible in turn the subsequent citation and re-telling of those stories. In this way, the will-to-order that connects the moments internal to each Borgesian story is dissolved into a disorderly chain of tellings and re-tellings. On one level, it is possible to

[131] As he puts it in a 2009 interview, marking the distance separating himself and peers such as Juan José Saer and Miguel Briante from somewhat older writers such as Adolfo Prieto and David Viñas, who had re-read and canonized Arlt yet were still incapable of giving Borges the time of day, "[é]ramos una generación que a diferencia de otras ya no tenia problemas con Borges y que teníamos con Arlt una relación mucho menos programática" ("'En Santa María'" 112).

isolate well-formed "Borgesian" story-fragments in the pages of each of Piglia's first two novels. The story told in *Respiración artificial* of how a young Franz Kafka glimpses the nightmare of World War II in the prophetic words of a young Adolph Hitler and takes that nightmare as the material for his fictions is one such story. Another, told in *La ciudad ausente*, is the story of a young girl who loses her grip on language and is taught a new syntax and lexicon by her musician-father, who narrates variations on a single theme to her in an endeavor to help her recapture her lost tongue. Borges would surely approve of these stories, yet, following Rancière, it is also important to recognize that he would just as surely not approve of the way they have been linked together via Piglia's disorderly use of relationality as a will-to-dissemination that drives his novels forward from beginning to end.

"Homenaje a Roberto Arlt," for its part, can furthermore be reinterpreted in a Borgesian light by re-framing what Rancière describes as the impersonal power of the fable in terms of the Althusserian theory of ideology. One could say, paraphrasing Rancière, that in Piglia's story there is only one genre, the genre of the ideological imagination, and that, in the literary text, it is none other than *ideological man* who speaks to his natural audience, ideological man. In this light, it bears noting the way in which Piglia's re-reading of Borges over the course of the 1970s progressively converges on a vision of his predecessor almost as a proto-Althusserian theorist of ideology. The problem with previous generations' readings of Borges is that they confused the personal will of the individual (Borges) with the impersonal will of ideology. They failed to see that, strictly speaking, "Borges" does not write his texts; ideology writes *through* him. And, importantly, Borges himself seems to have comprehended this. As Piglia explains in the opening sentence of his well-known 1979 essay "Ideología y ficción en Borges": "[h]ay una ficción que acompaña y sostiene la ficción borgeana: se trata de un relato fracturado, disperso, en el que

Borges construye la historia de su escritura" (3). Previous readers were quick to relate this underlying story to Borges's personal history, interpreting it as a factual story of privilege and escapism in which Borges the writer is the product of his mother's illustrious ancestors (war heroes who participated in pivotal moments of early Argentine history) and his father's voluminous library filled with the English-language books devoured by Borges in his youth. The problem with these readings is that they don't recognize that the author of that story is not the man, Borges, but the ideological processes that speak through him:

> [l]a coherencia de esa construcción es tal que no debemos ver ahí un secreto que la crítica tendría que descifrar, sino las marcas visibles de una interpretación ideológica que el mismo Borges se da para definir a la vez su lugar en la sociedad y su relación con la literatura … [E]n Borges las relaciones de parentesco son metafóricas de todas las demás … Así esa ficción que intentamos reconstruir demuestra ser a la vez social (porque es una concepción de clase la que se expresa ahí) e individual (porque en su enunciación no puede separarse de la posición del sujeto que reordena y da forma al material ideológico). (3)

As Piglia sees it, critics from previous generations had consistently sought to decipher the secret behind Borges's autobiographical fictions of family lineage, encountering in his writings the visible manifestations of his upbringing and class position. They do this at the cost of ignoring the way in which the material for the fragmentary autobiography that accompanies and sustains Borges's fictions is already ideological in nature: they take the *imaginary* relation that Borges establishes with the real conditions of his existence as if it were an accurate, *non*-ideological representation of his personal circumstances. This is the lesson in ideology that Borges has surreptitiously imparted to his readers by gifting them this dispersed, fragmented *relato* that

accompanies and sustains his fictions. In this light, Piglia's cross of Borges and Arlt can be understood to effectively bring this vision of the relationship between ideological processes and literary production to bear on the Arltian textual subject, evacuating it of the traces of the bourgeois individualism that mid-century readers such as David Viñas and Oscar Masotta were able to detect beneath the more revolutionary aspects of Arlt's literary project.

Piglia's increasing interest in the conspiracy, in turn, works from the opposite extreme, re-inscribing the Borgesian insistence on the well-formed story as a means of counterbalancing the tendency toward absolute indifference inherent in the entropic proliferation of *relatos* that reaches its farthest consequences in the storytelling machine of *La ciudad ausente*. Instead of asking, as the 19th-century writers studied by Rancière ask, why *these things or these words* in particular possess such expressive power, Piglia's literary machine is haunted by a similar question: why *these relatos*? His identification of the anti-liberal conspiracy as *the relato* that unites the activities of the political and artistic avant-gardes can be taken to address this threat of indifference. Once again paraphrasing Rancière's words regarding Borges's approach to literature, one could say that the fictions that Piglia studies in the pages of his *Teoría del complot*, like Borges's well-constructed fictions, also possess a quite specific texture. They are all fables of conspiracy, stories in which the secret is always the same because it is the fact of conspiration itself that has the last word. In this light, Piglia's reading of Macedonio's *Museo* in his *Teoría del complot* essay bears recalling: when Piglia condenses the pages of the Macedonian novel into a concise plot, explaining that "[e]l nudo ficcional es la construcción de un complot y, a la vez, ese complot se superpone con la escritura de una novela" (27), he manages to thread the

needle and carry out the impossible Borgesian reading of Macedonio's novel by passing the entirety of its fifty-plus prologues and nineteen chapters through the plot of the conspiracy.[132]

The strength of David Kelman's reading of Piglia in *Counterfeit Politics* is that it follows the thread laid out by Piglia and universalizes this basic understanding of the conspiracy into a comprehensive theory of political and literary fictions. Kelman emphasizes that "an attention to the narrative structure of conspiracy theories shows that every political narrative must tell the story of an illegitimate force that is undermining the legitimacy of an official or hegemonic discourse" (9), and goes on to insist that this movement, in which a conspiratorial force originating in an "inaccessible event that cannot be fully known" (9) perpetually ruins the claim to absolute legitimacy of any and all hegemonic forms of politics. In this way, the Borgesian mandate is finally brought back to bear on the neo-Romantic model of the garland of *relato*-fragments, but with a twist: while the conspiratorial fiction expresses a disruptive, disorderly power that forms the generative point of origin of the liberal order itself (like the power of love is the point of origin for Novalis's child), its effectiveness is ultimately grounded in the efficacy of a single plot. One could say, then, that in the last instance the disorderly force of the conspiratorial avant-garde work of fiction is paradoxically guaranteed by its fidelity to the well-

[132] As was emphasized in Chapter 1, this reading tends to collapse the *other* plot that weaves its way through the pages of the *Museo*: the plot of the traumatic moment of cognitive breakdown or "Efecto de desidentificación" (*Museo* 33) in which the reader's sense of self dissolves into a vision of the universe as a self-less "almismo ayoico" (*No todo es vigilia* 243). This collapse might now be understood in terms of a distinction between calculation and the incalculable. The conspiracy is formed in an act of extreme calculation, in which a wager is placed on the possibility of undoing the hegemonic order. With regard to Macedonio's plot of cognitive breakdown, on the other hand, it makes absolutely no sense to speak of calculation: the denouement of the plot of cognitive breakdown is, strictly speaking, incalculable. The event of disidentification is a latent possibility that *may* occur through the reader's intellectual intercourse with Macedonio's writing, but, in a sentence in which an increasing uncertainty grows with each successive clause, the author-figure of the prologues of the *Museo* speculates that he has perhaps produced, in the entirety of his written work, "ocho o diez momentos en que, creo, dos o tres renglones conmueven la estabilidad, unidad de alguien, a veces, creo, la mismidad del lector" (33).

ordered conspiracy-plot. The increasing centrality of the conspiracy-plot to Piglia's vision of the history of the avant-garde can thus be understood as an additional turn of the screw, in which Piglia reasserts the centrality of the well-told Borgesian story as a means of controlling or taming the will-to-disorder at the heart of his novelistic poetics of relationality.

Piglia's literary project can thus ultimately be understood in terms of its perpetual oscillation between polar extremes. If the reading of Piglia in Chapter 3 hinges on a distinction between neo-Arltian and neo-Macedonian periods of his literary project, which arise in response to two radically divergent historical problematics (the "revolutionary" annihilation of literature's autonomy, and the "postmodern" defense of an autonomous standpoint vis-à-vis liberal modernity), this re-framing of Piglia's project in light of Rancière's reading of Borges reproduces this distinction and points toward its ultimately irresolvable nature. Modern literature, for Piglia, is perpetually caught between the calculating will that guides Borges' radicalized Aristotelianism and the process of infinite becoming of the garland of *relatos* that never cease to tell themselves to themselves as they pass through speakers, authors, listeners, and readers.

Final remarks: The Argentine novel in the aesthetic regime of art

In the thirteen years separating the French-language publications of *Mute Speech* (1998) and *Aisthesis* (2011), Rancière's understanding of aesthetic modernity undergoes a subtle shift. If *Mute Speech* culminates in a reading of Marcel Proust that celebrates the way in which his approach to literature "takes up residence at the heart of the contradiction between literature's principles" (170), by *Aisthesis* he has increasingly gravitated toward a position in which the contradiction between the symbolic principle and the principle of indifference is reconceived as a conflict between one vision of modernism in which art progressively "[closes] itself off in some

celestial autonomy" (*Aisthesis* xiii), and another which "tends to erase the specificities of the arts and to blur the boundaries that separate them from each other and from ordinary experience" (xii). These two visions, however, are not equally weighted in Rancière's more recent works: it is the latter vision, that of an art driven to perpetually cross boundaries, reconnecting itself with everyday life, which is identified as the principal "movement belonging to the aesthetic regime" (xii). This does not amount to a suppression of the contradiction at the heart of aesthetic modernity—Rancière insists that he does not seek to lead these dueling visions of modernism "toward some apotheosis or end point" (xiii)—, but it does require Rancière to choose sides, rejecting the perspective of those who tend toward the identification of aesthetic modernity with the conquest of autonomy, and effectively accusing *them* of suppressing or collapsing this contradiction. In this sense, one could say that it ultimately becomes as impossible for Rancière to read key figures in the history of modernism such as Clement Greenberg, Theodor Adorno, and Jorge Luis Borges as it would be for Borges to read the disorderly novels of Arlt and Macedonio.

The pages of this dissertation have sought, like Rancière's Proust, to take up residence at the heart of a contradiction that was initially framed, in the opening paragraphs of the introduction, in terms of a conflict between Clement Greenberg's Kantian vision of modernism as a self-critical pursuit of medium-specific purity and Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde as a dialectical endeavor to overcome art's autonomy. The reading of Macedonio Fernández presented in Chapter 1 illustrates how, rather than treating this conflict as an either/or question, Macedonio's *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* paradoxically occupies both sides of the conflict, elaborating an understanding of literature in which the novel can only reconnect the reader with life by aspiring to absolutely seclude itself away *from life*. Chapter 2 traces an inverse process

taking place in the novels of Roberto Arlt. While Arlt's novelistic poetics is grounded in the perpetual blurring of the boundary line between literary and non-literary materials, it is ultimately legitimated by Arlt's marking of a strict distinction between artist and non-artist. If all of the stuff of life can flow into art, art must not flow back into life. Chapter 3, finally, traces the fate of these respective treatments of the relationship between art and life in the works of Ricardo Piglia, marking a temporal distinction on the interior of Piglia's literary project between an initial aspiration to demolish the autonomy of literature, and a later re-inscription of a minimal, conspiratorial degree of separation between literature and a radically heterogeneous postmodern condition.

This conclusion, finally, comes full circle by way of an extended reading of Borges. It showcases the way in which Rancière makes Borges occupy a similar standpoint to Greenberg by converting him into an avatar of the autonomy-centered visions of modernism that Rancière seeks to refute. In showing how Piglia oscillates between extremes, at times grounding literature in the entropic process of perpetual becoming that Borges condemns, and at times bringing Borges's medium-specific identification of the well-formed plot constructed via the artifice of an impersonal will, these final pages ultimately reinforce this dissertation's vision of the Argentine novel of the past century. Against prominent theories of modernism and the avant-garde that identify the movement of the arts in aesthetic modernity with the conquest *or* the overcoming of autonomy, these pages have carried out a sustained argument that these divergent understandings are instead inseparable, and together occupy the center of an open-ended process in which literature perpetually seeks to renew itself, and to renew life, by using the conflict between these positions as its generative principle.

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---. "Conversación entre Ricardo Piglia y Roberto Bolaño." *El País*, 3 Mar. 2011.

---. *Crítica y ficción*. Anagrama, 1986.

---. *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi: Años de formación*. Anagrama, 2015.

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---. *Formas breves.* Anagrama, 2006.

---. "Homenaje a Roberto Arlt." *Prisión perpetua.* Sudamericana, 1988, pp. 135-185.

---. "Ideología y ficción en Borges." *Punto de Vista*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1979, pp. 3-6.

---. Interview with Edgardo Dieleke. "'En Santa María nada pasaba.' Entrevista con Ricardo Piglia sobre Juan Carlos Onetti." *Letral*, no. 2, 2009, pp. 110-124.

---. Interview with Marithelma Costa. *Hispamérica*, vol. 15, no. 44, 1986, pp. 39-54.

---. "Mao Tse-Tung: Práctica estética y lucha de clases." *Literatura y sociedad*. Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1974, pp. 119-137.

---. "Notas sobre Macedonio en un diario." *Prisión perpetua*, Sudamericana, 1988, pp. 88-97.

---. *Respiración artificial*. Anagrama, 2001.

---. "Roberto Arlt : Una crítica de la economía literaria." *Los Libros*, no. 29, March 1973, pp. 22-27.

---. "Roberto Arlt: La ficción del dinero." *Hispamérica* vol. 3, no. 7, 1974, pp. 25-28.

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---. *Teoría del complot*. Editorial Mate, 2007.

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Prieto, Julio. *Desencuadernados: Vanguardias ex-céntricas en el Río de la Plata.* Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2002.

---. *De la sombrología: Seis comienzos en busca de Macedonio Fernández*. Iberoamericana/Vervuet, 2010.

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---. Interview with Oliver Davis. “On *Aisthesis*.” *Rancière Now: Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière*. Polity, 2013. 202-218.

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---. *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribtuion of the Sensible.* Continuum, 2004.

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---. *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*. Verso Books, 2015.

Rockhill, Gabriel. Introduction. *Mute Speech*, by Jacques Rancière, Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 1-28.

Rosenberg, Fernando. *The Avant-Garde and Geopolitics in Latin America*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006

Saítta, Silvia. “Traiciones desviadas, ensoñaciones imposibles: los usos del folletín en Roberto Arlt. *Iberoamericana* vol. 23, no. 2, 1999, pp. 63-81.

Sánchez Prado, Ignacio M. “The Limitations of the Sensible: Reading Rancière in Mexico’s Failed Transition.” *parallax,* vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 372-383.

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Schuchard, Barbara. "El Astrólogo arltiano y el Dr. Mabuse: pistas para una pesquisa intermedial." *Iberoamericana*, Nueva época, vol.1, no. 4, Dec. 2001, pp. 154-158.

Shail, Andrew. *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism*. Routledge, 2012.

Smith, Daniel W. "Introduction: Pierre Klossowski: From Theology to Counter-Utopia." *Living Currency,* by Pierre Klossowski. Bloomsbury, 2017.

---. "Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche: Impulses, Phantasms, Simulacra, Stereotypes. *Diacritics,* vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, pp. 8-21.

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Terán, Oscar. *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880-1910): derivas de la 'cultura científica.'"* Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000.

Thayer, Willy. "Vanguardia, dictadura, globalización (La serie de las artes visuals en Chile, 1957-2000)." *Pensar en/la dictadura*, edited by Nelly Richard and Alberto Moreiras. Cuarto Propio, 2001, pp. 239-260.

Todorov, Tzvetan. “The Notion of Literature.” 1973. *New Literary History*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-12.

Tynyanov, Jurij. “On Literary Evolution.” 1927. *Readings in Russian Poetics,* edited by Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, The MIT Press, 1971, pp. 66-78.

Vallejo, César. “Poesía nueva.” 1926. *Vanguardistas en su tinta: Documentos de la Vanguardia en América Latina*, edited by Celina Manzoni, Ediciones Corregidor, 2008, pp. 195-196.

Vargas Llosa, Mario. *El viaje a la ficción: el mundo de Juan Carlos Onetti*. Alfaguara, 2008.

Vecchio, Diego. *Egocidios: Macedonio Fernández y la liquidación del yo.* Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2003.

---. “‘Yo no existo.’ Macedonio Fernández y la filosofía.” *Historia crítica de la literatura argentina 8: Macedonio*, edited by Roberto Ferro. Emecé Editores, 2007, pp. 381-410.

Viñas, David. *Literatura argentina y realidad política: De Sarmiento a Cortázar*. Ediciones Siglo Veinte, 1971.

Vitagliano, Miguel. “La cámara que escribe.” *Página/12*, 17 March 2013, http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/libros/10-4971-2013-03-17.html.

Williams, Gareth. *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America.* Duke University Press, 2002.

Yúdice, George. “Rethinking the Avant-Garde from the Periphery.” *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, edited by Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monleón, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999, pp. 52-80.

MATTHEW STEVEN JOHNSON

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Ph.D., Spanish with a concentration in Hispanic Literatures, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN — 2013-2019

Ph.D. Minor: Portuguese

Dissertation Title: Critical Disagreements: Conceptualizations of the Avant-Garde in the Argentine Novel

Director: Patrick Dove

Completion date: May 2019

M.A., Spanish, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN — 2011-2013

B.A., Depts. of Spanish and Political Science, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL — 2002-2006

PUBLICATIONS AND SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles

"Althusserianism and the Left-Wing Rehabilitation of Borges in Argentina." *Variaciones Borges*, no. 47, 2019, pp. 203-220..

"History, Obstinacy, and the Historical Novel: Antonio di Benedetto's *Zama*." *A Contracorriente*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2018, pp. 294-318.

Articles under Review

"Cinema and Simulation in the Novels of Roberto Arlt." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*. Revised and Resubmitted.

"Balzac, Flaubert, Clarín: Practices of Symptomatic and Surface Reading in Leopoldo Alas's *La Regenta*." *Letras Hispanas*. Under review.

Manuscripts in Preparation

"Piglia's Macedonio, Klossowski's Nietzsche: Literature, Philosophy, and Conspiracy in Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente.*"

"César Aira, Contemporary Artist: Inter-Medial Dialogues and Theories of (Post-)Conceptual Art in the Literary Project of Aira."

"On the Transatlantic Emergence of Conceptual Art: Marcel Duchamp and Macedonio Fernández."

Book Reviews

"Borge, Jason. *Tropical Riffs: Latin America and the Politics of Jazz.*" (Review written in Spanish). Forthcoming in *Revista Iberoamericana*, vol. 267, 2019.

"Fore, Devin. *Realism after Modernism.*" *Hiedra*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 87-88.

"Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism.*" *Hiedra*, vol. 2, 2014, pp. 125-126.

Scholarly Presentations and Conference-Related Activities

Presenter. "Repatriating Borges: Literature and Politics on the Argentine Left, 1970-1980." 2019
Modern Language Association Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, January 3-6.

Panel Co-Organizer. "Borgesian Transactions: Literary Debts, Literary Inheritances." Modern 2019
Languages Association Annual Convention, Chicago, IL. January 3-6.

Presenter. "The Literary Machine and Resistance to the Hyper-Vigilant State in Ricardo Piglia's 2018
La ciudad ausente." The Kentucky Foreign Languages Conference, University of Kentucky,
Lexington, KY, April 19-21.

Presenter. "A Book of Poetry, a Copper-Plated Rose, and Luis Ángel Firpo: On Three Prominent 2017
Images in Roberto Arlt's Novels." 2017 Charles F. Fraker Conference, University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor, MI, February 10-11.

Presenter. "Art, Life, and the Museum of the Novel: Macedonio Fernández's Avant-Garde 2016
Aesthetics." Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literature, Lawrence, KS. November 3-5.

Presenter. "The Politics of Description in the Realist Novel: Reading *La Regenta* with Jacques 2016
Rancière." Diálogos 13 Graduate Student Research Conference, Indiana University,
Bloomington, IN. February 27-28.

Conference Co-Organizer. Diálogos 13 Graduate Student Research Conference, Indiana University, 2016
Bloomington, IN. February 27-28.

Presenter. "The Afterlife of Estrangement as Literary Device in Matilde Sánchez's *El desperdicio*." 2015
Latin American Studies Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico. May 27-30.

Panel Co-Organizer. "Specters of the Vanguard." Latin American Studies Association Conference, 2015
San Juan, Puerto Rico. May 27-30.

Presenter. "Legitimizations of the Modern Age in Hans Blumenberg and Luís de Camões." 2015
Diálogos 12 Graduate Student Research Conference, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.
February 27-28.

Conference Co-Organizer. Diálogos 12 Graduate Student Research Conference, Indiana University, 2015
Bloomington, Indiana. February 27-28.

Presenter. "The Reflection and Mediation of 1968 in Osvaldo Lamborghini's *El fiord*." 2014
Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literature, Madison, WI. October 9-11.

Presenter."Between Sarmiento and Shklovsky: Matilde Sánchez's *El desperdicio* as "Estranged 2014
Biography." Diálogos 11 Graduate Student Research Conference, Indiana University,
Bloomington, IN. February 22.

Departmental Presentations

"Balzac, Flaubert, Clarín: The Literary Politics of *La Regenta*." A Night in Memoriam of Professor 2018
Maryellen Bieder. Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University. April 12.

"A Novelist of Modern Life: Roberto Arlt from a Benjaminian Perspective." Brown Bag Series in 2016
Literature and Culture. Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University. March 4.

Research Interests

Modern and contemporary Latin American literature

Theories of modernism, the avant-garde, and the neo-avant-garde

The reception of critical theory and continental philosophy in Latin America

The emergence of modern mass cultural forms in Latin America

HONORS AND AWARDS

College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Student Travel Award ($300) 2019

Awarded by the College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University, for travel to the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Washington, DC.

Graduate Student Travel Grant ($400) 2019

Awarded by the Modern Language Association for travel to the annual convention of the Modern Language Association in Chicago, Illinois.

Graduate Conference Travel Award ($400) 2018

Awarded by the College Arts & Humanities Institute, *Indiana University, for travel to the annual convention of the Modern Language Association in Chicago, Illinois*.

GPSG Travel Award ($500) 2018

Awarded by the Graduate & Professional Student Government of Indiana University for Travel to the 2018 Kentucky Foreign Languages Conference in Lexington, Kentucky.

Departmental Travel Grant ($350) 2016

Awarded by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University, for travel to the 2016 Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literature in Lawrence, Kansas.

Dissertation Year Research Fellowship ($20,000; two-semester teaching release) 2016

Awarded by the College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University.

Doctoral Student Award for Academic Achievement (one-semester teaching release) 2015

Awarded by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University.

International Enhancement Grant ($2,000) 2015

Awarded by the Indiana University Office of the Vice President for International Affairs, for travel to Argentina to attend the 2015 Seminario de literatura argentina, *hosted by the Fundación Mempo Giardinelli in Resistencia, Argentina.*

Graduate Conference Travel Grant ($100) 2015

Awarded by the Graduate Student Advisory Committee of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for travel to the 2014 Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literature in Madison, Wisconsin.

Graduate Conference Travel Award ($1,000) 2015

Awarded by the College Arts & Humanities Institute, *Indiana University, for travel to the 2015 Latin American Studies Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico.*

Departmental Travel Grant ($350) 2014

Awarded by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University, for travel to the 2014 Mid-American Conference on Hispanic Literature in Madison, Wisconsin.

J.M. Hill Award for Graduate Research in Literature ($250) 2014

Awarded by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University. Paper title:

"Entre Sarmiento y Shklovski: El desperdicio *de Matilde Sánchez como biografía extrañada."*

Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) Fellowship ($30,000; two-semester teaching release) 2013-14

Awarded by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University.

National Merit Scholarship (full tuition scholarship with room and board) 2002-2006

Awarded by the University of Florida.

TEACHING

Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (2011-Present)

Introduction to the Study of Hispanic Cultures (S324)	Fall 2017, Spring 2018, and Fall 2018
Introduction to Hispanic Literature (S328)	Fall 2015 and Summer 2016
Spanish Grammar in Context (S280)	Fall 2014 and Spring 2015
Second Year Spanish II (S250)	Fall 2012, Spring 2013, and Summer 2014
Second Year Spanish I (S200)	Spring 2012
First Year Spanish (S105)	Fall 2011

SERVICE

Graduate Student Advisory Committee (Co-Chair) 2015-16

Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

College Graduate Hearing Board (Student Representative) 2015-16

Indiana University, College of Arts and Sciences

Diálogos Graduate Student Research Conference Co-Organizer 2015 and 2016

Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Graduate Student Advisory Council (Secretary) 2014-15

Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Lectures Committee (Member) 2014-15

Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Associate Instructor, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University 2011-Present

Teach sections of 100-and 200-level courses in the department's Basic Language Program, an advanced 200-level course focusing on grammar and composition, and 300-level introductions to Hispanic Literature and Hispanic Cultures. Develop course content utilizing the communicative approach to language teaching, plan and teach all lessons, and participate in the design of formal assessments for all sections.

Copy Editor, Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Land, Indiana University 2018-Present

Provide copy and content editing for the Eppley Institute's publications, conference-related materials, and promotional information.

Instructor and Financial Coordinator, Indiana University Honors Program in Foreign Languages (IUHPFL), Viña del Mar, Chile. 2017

Taught a six-week introductory class on Chilean literature for a group of 22 high school

students participating in the Honors Program. Accompanied and supervised students on all program-related activities and excursions. Also served as financial coordinator for the Viña del Mar program site. Followed the budget provided by the program office. Made all program-related on-site purchases, tracked all expenses, and communicated any deviations from site budget to the program office.

Copy Editor, Special Issue of the *Revista de Estudos Literários* (Coimbra, Portugal). 2016
In connection with the Transatlantic Dialogues Symposium, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University, October 23-24, 2015

Edited and formatted sixteen articles, bringing them in line with the publication standards of the Revista de Estudos Literários.

Translator, Transatlantic Dialogues Symposium, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Indiana University 2015

Translated from Portuguese to English the keynote speech by Carlos Reis, "Eça de Queirós and the Character as Fiction," for the symposium "Transatlantic Dialogues: Realism and Modernity in Eça de Queirós and Machado de Assis" that took place at Indiana University on October 23-24, 2015. The translation was later published in the Spring 2017 issue of the Luso-Brazilian Review.

Freelance Translator, Inter-American Journal of Education for Democracy (IJED) 2010-2011

Translated a series of seven 20-30 page journal articles: five from Spanish to English, and two from Portuguese to English. The IJED is a refereed academic publication that seeks to foster intellectual discussion and exchange about efforts to promote education for democratic citizenship across the Americas.

TEFL/Education Volunteer, United States Peace Corps, Mongolia 2007-08

Lived in the rural community of Galshar, in the Khentii province in eastern Mongolia. Taught 4th- 9th grade English at the local 9-year school, designing the curriculum and delivering lessons for all levels. Participated in the planning and coordination of all local events involving the school, including holiday celebrations, athletic competitions, and cultural events. Attended Peace Corps-sponsored workshops in Ulaanbaatar concerning English teaching practices, community development, and counterpart development.

LANGUAGES

English	Native speaker
Spanish	Near-native proficiency
Portuguese	Advanced proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking
French and Italian	Advanced reading proficiency; successfully completed Indiana University's Graduate School Foreign Language Exam (GSFLE) in both languages in 2011.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Latin American Studies Association 2014-Present

Modern Language Association 2013-Present